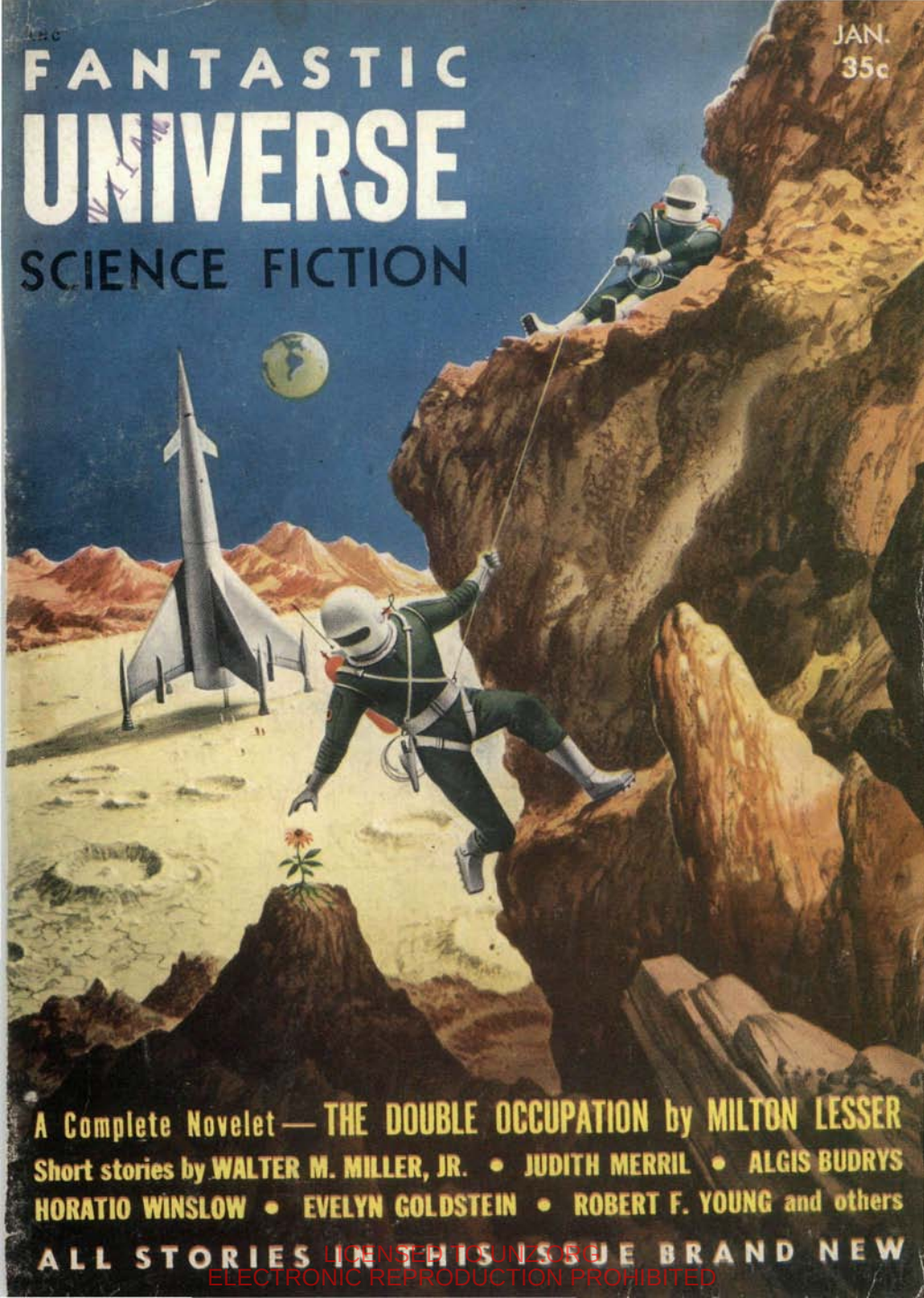
FANTASTIC
UNIVERSE
SCIENCE FICTION
JAN.
35c
A Complete Novelet — THE DOUBLE OCCUPATION by MILTON LESSER
Short stories by WALTER M. MILLER, JR. • JUDITH MERRIL • ALGIS BUDRYS
HORATIO WINSLOW • EVELYN GOLDSTEIN • ROBERT F. YOUNG and others
ALL STORIES IN THIS ISSUE BRAND NEW
CONNECTED UNIVERSE
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THE STORY BEHIND THE COVER . . .

Scientific speculation on mature levels of sobriety and common sense, *i. e.*, the careful analyzation and correlation of such data as we now possess, takes a very harsh and unbending attitude toward the possibility of life on other planets of the Solar System. You can't very well have biological life as we know it in an atmosphere of deadly methane gases, or simon-pure formaldehyde, or under atmospheric pressures so tremendous that even a silicon organism would be squeezed grotesquely flat.

On Mars alone plant life on a very rudimentary plane might by some incredible miracle of adaptation have a fighting chance for survival, and it does not impair the integrity of the best minds to go overboard just a little in that respect. A coloration of a most arresting character appears to spread over the surface of Mars when the polar ice caps diminish, and who can say with certainty that a host of low-grade lichens in gaudy springtime array might not have made the Red Planet their pride and joy?

It is a pleasant whimsey, not wholly inconsistent with the physiognomy of Mars as it stands revealed in the crystal-bright prism of sound scientific surmise. But when we approach the Moon the prism cracks and afreets dark and mysterious go shrieking over its airless craters and desolate pumice plains. Life on the Moon? We no longer tar and feather the recklessly audacious. But it is easy to imagine the long night of obloquy which would eclipse the reputation of any scientist of the first rank who would dare to suggest such a possibility.

But can we be *completely* sure? Just suppose—and you can't be incarcerated for supposing—that an expedition to the moon actually stumbled on a flowering plant in the depths of a lunar gully. Would not each member feel with Keats:

> *"—like some watcher of the spheres*
> *When a new planet swims into his ken,*
> *Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eye*
> *He gazed on the Pacific, and all his men*
> *Looked at each other with a wild surmise,*
> *Silent on a peak in Darien."*

In this month's excitingly imaginative cover illustration you see it happening before your very eyes.

FRANK BELKNAP LONG.

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FANTASTIC UNIVERSE

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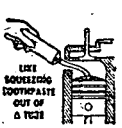

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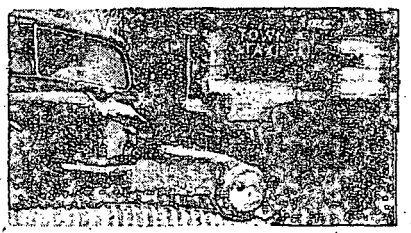

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the double occupation

by . . . Milton Lesser

No man was ever more inhumanly trapped in a body not his own. Could the star-bright heritage of Earth strike away his bonds?

IT WAS Corporal Ralph Cook's first tour of occupation duty and as he stood waiting on line at the T. M. checkpoint, stiffly ill at ease in his unfamiliar body, he felt slightly sick to his stomach. But that was to be expected so soon after transmigration. At any rate, he told himself with some small sense of relief, his stomach occupied approximately the same anatomical position in the complex entity which enveloped him.

What's your line of work? he asked the host mind which shared the exoskeletonal Jaycee body with him.

The responding thought was truculent, arrogant. *I am not required to answer that question at this time.* Evidently the Jaycee host knew his Interstellar Law—which might be good or bad, depending on the creature's attitude. Right now, it looked bad, and might quickly become terrifying.

I was just trying to get acquainted, thought Ralph, holding his anger in check. He expected a reply, but was not too surprised when the Jaycee failed to answer him.

The strange impersonation theme has fascinated two generations of science-fantasy readers. But in this remarkable novelette by a leading practitioner in the genre it has been utilized in a way no other writer, to the best of our knowledge, has ever thought of. For Milton Lesser's Earthman does not simply double for an alien entity. He becomes one, with results so cosmically suspenseful you'll be on the inside with him, looking fearfully out.

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The long line of Jaycee soldiers, looking a great deal more like giant praying mantises than the lobsters they were supposed to resemble, advanced slowly toward the head of the checkpoint, their thin, delicate antennae quivering in the breeze which was whistling through the tall reeds at the edge of Lake Comoy.

A human major and a master sergeant stood at the head of the line, and as the officer asked questions, the enlisted man made notations on a pad.

Overhead, Jayc's twin suns scorched a yellow-green sky. The larger, saffron orb, hung suspended almost at the zenith, while the smaller green one—actually blue, the Troop Information lecturer had pointed out—epicycled erratically behind it.

Ahead of the line and beyond the checkpoint, the mounds and towers of Comoy City, bomb-scarred but still bustling with Jaycee activity, smouldered in the noon-day heat.

As Ralph and his host neared the head of the checkpoint, he wondered anxiously if the Jaycee would cooperate in the routine interrogation. It was hardly his problem, for they could easily substitute another host and confine the ornery Jaycee. But he knew he would be very ill if he had to undergo the transmigration ordeal again.

"Name?" asked the major, a bantam-rooster of a man, trim and neat in starched khaki, his bull-neck thrust sharply forward beneath his close-cropped head.

He was not exactly a physical paragon, this major. But Ralph envied him the familiar bipedal body, and facial features, the hands with their opposed thumbs, the five-digited feet—everything a man takes for granted until he gets occupation orders.

"Corporal Ralph Cook, sir," said Ralph, the voice box smoothly encapsulated between his head and thorax translating the clicks and clacks into their human equivalents.

The master sergeant scribbled and the major stared, frowning a little: "And your host's name?"

Ralph waited tensely, releasing his hold on the speech centers of his brain, waiting for the Jaycee to answer. Suddenly he was clicking again, and the voice box blared: "Desmar Kaloy, *sir.*" There was too much emphasis on the "sir."

"Your occupation?" demanded the major, strutting around Ralph's new body in a circle, hands behind his back, examining the mantis-lobster minutely, although he had seen a hundred others like it that very morning.

"I am a school teacher, elementary level," Ralph heard himself replying, both in the clicks and clacks which he now could understand, and in artificially vocalized English as well.

The major looked at the master sergeant and chuckled. "They have the same classification and assignment troubles we have," he said. "A

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school teacher in the Infantry." Then he told Ralph's host:

"Kaloy, the alternative to successful cooperation with your guest is confinement for the duration of the occupation. Is that understood?"

"Yes, sir. I was told that at the Prisoner of War camp, north of Lake Comoy."

"Very well, Kaloy. I trust you will not allow yourself to forget it."

Ralph could sense his host withdrawing from the centers of speech, and even from consciousness. But the Jaycee mind was there, lurking, listening—

"All right, Cook," the major was saying, "you're a school teacher. According to your form twenty, you've an impressive scholastic background. Do you think you can teach school here on Jayc?"

"I can try, Major," Ralph said, not caring to remind him that teaching a Union history of the Civil War in the deep South on Terra would have been a less hazardous undertaking.

"Don't sound so glum," the major said cheerfully, while the master sergeant continued with his scribbling. Apparently the voice box could translate Ralph's emotions along with his clicking speech. "Your tour of duty will only last six months. Then you'll have six more of rest and rehabilitation on Arcturus IV before you return to Earth for discharge. You're not a career man, are you?"

"No, sir," Ralph said, too hastily to please the master sergeant, who looked up quickly and glared at him.

"Well, good luck," the major said. "No matter how bad it gets, remember there are compensations awaiting you on Arcturus IV. Move along."

Arcturus IV was the Garmisch-Partenkirchen of the Army, complete with mountains loftier than the Alps towering over azure, tropical seas, and carnivals the year around. It was famous for its I.S.O. hostesses—and an up-to-date hospital which treated, primarily, psycho-neuroses and associated nervous disorders.

The master sergeant removed Ralph's voice box from its capsule sheath at the top of his thorax and placed it in a neat row on the warehouse steps. Ralph checked a foolish impulse to stoop and retrieve it. Somehow, it represented his last connection with his own people. For the next six months he would be a Jaycee, living the Jaycee way of life. Desmar Kaloy, school teacher. Provided. Kaloy played ball—and Ralph could bring charges and have the Jaycee confined if he proved stubborn—none of the other Jaycees would be aware of the masquerade.

Masquerade? Parasitic relationship would cut closer to the truth, Ralph told himself bitterly. Two million Earth soldiers, rotated at six month intervals, whose task it was to occupy and peacefully indoctrinate a planet which had, for some

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obscure reason, lost its respect for the interstellar moral code, and gone to war with a neighboring world! Why did Earth have to draw occupation duty whenever a few billion "bugs" needed re-indoctrination? It was infuriating to realize that Desmar Kaloy might very well be secretly laughing at him.

II

Purchasing a ticket on the monorail in Comoy City at his host's direction, Ralph was soon carried aloft in the gleaming, air-borne train. For interminable minutes the pale green waters of Lake Comoy tilted up crazily behind them as if they would spill into the busy city, and then, all at once, the silent monorail had climbed the range of hills beyond the city, and was swooping down with incredible speed into the green-brown lowlands, whizzing along so fast the landscape blurred, and the bushy blue trees became inverted pyramids. As Ralph stared, the occasional mound houses and the small settlements along the monorail merged even more miraculously into a blur of pastel color.

Ralph shared his compartment with two male Jaycees and a female. The males wore their traditional yellow sack-like garments, but the female was naked, her exoskeleton buffed and polished to a uniformly dazzling sheen, and stamped here and there with an intricate abstract design—her clan symbol.

Each of the Jaycees, Ralph included, had an irregular, branch-like stanchion in place of a seat. It was a grotesque way of traveling, but Ralph had to admit that the supports were not uncomfortable. Theoretically it should have been impossible to relax when perched upon an artificial tree-limb, but theory simply did not square with the facts.

"Going far?" the female clicked at Ralph.

He squirmed warily on his perch. This was his first contact with a Jaycee other than his host, and though he knew it to be purely a routine question, a manner of passing the time of day it put him on his guard, and made him uneasy.

"All the way to Central Terminal," Kaloy supplied the answer for him. "My home is in Plainview Heights."

"You're lucky, then. That far from Comoy City, the Army of Occupation should be spread thin."

"Why?" Ralph asked. "Do they bother you?"

"Where on Jayc have *you* been?"

"Studying in the University at Porgriny," Ralph answered, quickly. Had he admitted serving in the Jaycee Army, her suspicions would have been instantly aroused. After all, one out of every five Jaycee soldiers were now serving as hosts for Earth's occupation forces.

"Overtly, I suppose the Terrans are all right," the female admitted.

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"But don't you see, it isn't *their* war? They don't even know what caused it—what it was about. They were merely assigned here to occupy us and—well, to indoctrinate us. There's just no other word for it."

"Should there be? I mean, isn't interstellar cooperation important—not just for Jayc, but for all worlds?"

The female clicked wordlessly for a moment, then said: "I won't argue with you. Let's keep this a pleasant trip, shall we? I suppose you're a confirmed interstellarist?"

"I have an open mind," Ralph told her. Instantly Kaloy's sentience stirred within his own, saying, *What's the matter with you? Do you want to get me confined through no fault of my own? She'll see right through us in another minute. Just keep quiet and let her do most of the talking.*

On sped the monorail, the suns of Jayc sinking toward the horizon behind it, and casting quick dark shadows ahead across the flat country. By the time a mauve-streaked emerald dusk descended, Ralph had learned that the female, whose name was Ayd Setay, was a psychological social worker in Central Terminal. Her job, ironically was to rehabilitate Jaycee soldiers *after* they had spent six months as hosts!

The two males were members of a plumbing syndic in Mountainvale, a small city a few miles from Central Terminal. One of them had a nephew who attended school in Plainview Heights. Had Ralph, by any chance, ever heard of him? Not that he recalled.

Dinner for the Jaycees, who, like men, were omnivorous, might well have been quite palatable by human standards—although it was almost impossible to tell. At its conclusion, the monorail began to climb at an ever-increasing angle and a busily-whirring heat-device quickly dispelled the ensuing chill from their compartment.

"We'll reach Mountainvale before morning," one of the males said. "Elevation is almost fifteen thousand feet, so you can rest assured it's cold. Have you been to this part of the country before, Mr. Kaloy?"

"Only passing through," said Ralph, noncommittally.

"Well, I think you'll like it. Mind, I'm no chauvinist, but the mountains around here are unspoiled: We're still a hundred and fifty miles from Mountainvale, and more than twice that distance from Lake Comoy. It isn't good farming country, but some day the government is going to discover its value as a resort area. Meanwhile, if you're thrilled by an unspoiled wilderness, take a look outside. You could walk for days without seeing anyone, especially when it snows."

Ralph peered through the oval window and saw large, slow-drifting snowflakes falling in the glare of the monorail's lights. Horizon-piled clouds had swept up swiftly with the coming of night, or—more

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probably—had been waiting for them in the higher mountains. The snow made him feel uneasy, even though their monorail compartment seemed warm and secure.

He couldn't understand the feeling until he remembered that the Jaycee breathing apparatus was located on the outside of the body, on the exoskeleton itself. The fear was Kaloy's and probably subconscious—akin to a man's fear of falling, but unquestionably worse. The snow, freezing on an unprotected exoskeleton, could strangle a Jaycee in short order.

"Well," Ayd Setay clicked comfortably, "I'm going to turn in. Perhaps I should look at the brighter side of things, Kaloy. After all, the Earth occupation has now gone through three rotations. I rather imagine they'll consider their job finished before too long."

It was a factor Ralph hadn't considered. His six months on Jayc might well be the last any human would have to spend on that bleak world. Better still, they might recall the entire occupation force before the six months elapsed.

"I'd certainly like that," he said.

So would I, Kaloy told him grimly.

The two males from the plumbing syndic had lowered their heads in repose until their sharp chins rested on their tiny, crossed forearms. Ayd Setay began clicking a little tune, as if singing herself to sleep. Soon she was silent, slumped and relaxed like the others. Even Kaloy's consciousness retreated almost beyond Ralph's ken.

If he shut his eyes—damn it, the Jaycees were not endowed with eyelids—he could almost picture himself back on Earth somewhere, speeding along in a train, with the ceaseless click-clacking lulling him to sleep, and dispelling irrational fears of fine powdery snow clogging his breathing pores, of strangling ice coating his exoskeleton, and of ever more feeble forearms and midarms clutching, clawing, sliding in its relentless embrace—

A strident whining sound awakened him as the monorail suddenly attempted deceleration too rapidly. He was thrust from his branch-perch and tumbled headlong to the floor of the compartment. Twisting over on his back he saw an expressionless Jaycee face appear in the doorway, and heard in frenzied, anxious clicks: "Fasten yourselves! The rail's out up ahead. The ice snapped it like a twig!"

The face was gone. The others stirred in wild alarm—the two men from the Mountainvale plumbing syndic lodged against the front wall of the compartment, and Ayd Setay still clinging precariously to her perch with one set of hands while she fastened a belt around her body with the other.

"Secure yourselves!" she clicked excitedly. "You heard what he said."

Ralph tried desperately to follow the example set by the two plumb-

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ers as they scurried back to their perches. But he was soon forced to surrender control to Kaloy, and was able to observe his own ascent on the artificial branch with surprising objectivity while the monorail went on whining and decelerating.

Straps were quickly fastened about the juncture of his thorax and abdomen. Overhead lights and the monorail's outside beams winked out. Ralph looked through inky darkness toward where he thought the oval window was, but could see nothing.

"It's still snowing, I think," one of the males clicked.

The snow bothered them more than anything else. The whining had faded away, to be replaced by a hissing, sliding sound. The break-neck deceleration of the monorail had surrendered to an irregular, almost gentle swaying.

"We're safe," said Ayd Setay, clicking with relief.

She spoke too soon. They swayed far to the left, hung for the barest instant suspended, and then plummeted down, hurtling end over end, dislodging the branch-perches from their floor-moorings, ripping the safety straps from Ralph's lobster-mantis body.

All the lights in the falling monorail went out, plunging the passengers into darkness.

The last thing Ralph remembered was an agonizing burst of pain in his head—and the fact that fear of falling had replaced fear of snow, even for Kaloy.

III

Ralph had a vague nightmare memory of snow, of Jaycees calling back and forth across a dazzling white expanse. It grew sharper, and became a memory of snow spilling down on him, of hands—not his own—brushing the snow away, of mournful clicks, of blankets and slick mountains of tarpaulins, of pain in four of his six host limbs and a terrible inability to move. Sharper still, and he grew aware of waves of suffocation which ebbed and flowed, of hands massaging him. Hands? Claws. He clicked and clicked and wanted to scream.

Someone prodded him.

"Here, drink this."

A container was tilted to his mandibles. It was scorching stuff, but he drank. Another liquid was sloshed about his exoskeleton, then vigorously rubbed into his tracheae. For a tormenting instant his whole body seemed afire, and he clicked outrageously. But afterwards he could breathe more easily, although his senses were drifting off vaguely as if they'd rubbed him down with some narcotic.

There were voices—or rather, clicks. The semantic difficulty, he thought, would always remain.

"Can we move this one?"

"He ought to remain still."

"He can't stay here. Anyway, the hospital in Mountainvale is already full."

"There's an extra bed and some medical supplies at the weather sta-

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tion on Halbady Peak. But I don't like the idea of moving him."

"We have no choice. Here, you! Bring that sledge. Easy now."

The pain was so violent when they lifted him that he passed out. He next was aware of a not unpleasant trundling motion and an expressionless face—he thought it was Ayd Setay, and Kaloy confirmed this—hovering over him. She clicked sympathetically and he fell asleep, dreaming of his own endoskeletonal body, bipedal and all at once the most beautiful thing in the world—until Kaloy, unfortunately not asleep, banished the dream with a distasteful click.

There was a mountaintop eyrie, glass-domed and utterly isolated, looking down on a world of snow and jagged peaks and valleys only dimly visible through an encircling golden haze. There was a solitary Jaycee who lived there, casting off weather balloons, checking wind velocity, listening to book-tapes and munching a stimulating dried leaf which, after many days, he gladly and graciously shared with Ralph.

There was even a perch, reclined at a comfortable forty-five degree angle, and all the good food Ralph-Kaloy could consume. There was not much talk but there was no real need for talk in the first few weeks. There was need only for rest.

With rest came a growing realization of the extent of injuries sustained, of the shattered, twisted exoskeleton—comparable to a multifractured spinal column—and the damaged tracheae which would heal with time. And there were occasional visits by the doctor from Mountainvale, whenever the weather permitted his passage through the mountains.

"You're a lucky fellow, Desmar Kaloy. There'll be some scars. A limp, perhaps. I don't like the looks of that left rear leg at all. But you'll be all right in time. As long as you don't go jumping over these mountains like a hopper during the next year or so, you should be fine."

There was the slow, quiet friendship of the meteorologist, a taciturn old Jaycee with a surprising fount of stories which kept Kaloy fascinated and which even Ralph found interesting. And there was the setting in of deep winter, as the Jaycee mountaineers called it. It came one night in a wild storm which threw together clashing thunder and lightning with a steady fall of snow, and damaged the meteorologist's radio equipment so thoroughly that communication with the outside world was made impossible until the coming of spring.

There was Ralph's impatience as the weeks rolled slowly by and his strength returned, and his impetuous insistence that the meteorologist try to repair the equipment.

"Very well, young fellow. It's your job."

And every day Ralph would spend most of his time on the damaged radio instrument. Transistors had not yet replaced vacuum

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tubes on Jayc, but the radio was basically familiar. Kaloy's lack of experience with any form of electronics, however, was to hamper the work, and it was not until the first spring thaw had reached the valleys far below, puffing billowing clouds of vapor toward the eyrie, that Ralph succeeded in his task.

Why was he so fiercely impatient? He didn't know. His tour of occupation duty had been a lark, with four of his six months already gone. Surely the attitude was an unreasonable one, for Kaloy's still-crippled body was only his temporarily. He'd be whole—and a human again—before he knew it. Still, had he fingernails, he would almost certainly have resorted to biting them.

Kaloy's increasing truculence may have had a great deal to do with it. The Jaycee host, when he wasn't listening to the stories which could be drawn, after much coaxing, from the meteorologist, would spitefully sulk in a corner of their mind.

When Ralph requested some not readily available information, Kaloy would balk, and finally cooperate—but only with reluctance. Ralph gathered that the Jaycee blamed his uninvited guest for the accident—which, at least, may have been partly true, for if Ralph had not occupied him, Kaloy would not have returned so soon to Plainview Heights.

It became worse every day, and by the morning Ralph had repaired the radio, Kaloy would hardly bother to answer his unspoken questions, unless, in so doing, he could go into malicious tirades about the men from Earth.

"Well," the meteorologist told Ralph, after speaking to Mountainvale for the first time on their repaired instrument, "I have to congratulate you. It's as good as new, Kaloy. They missed our weather reports, sure enough. But there wasn't anything we could do about that. Weather's fine in Mountainvale. A little cold, but not *this* cold."

"I guess I'll be heading down that way pretty soon now," Ralph told him.

"Well, now, I wouldn't rush things. Why don't you wait for the supply sledge, and travel back down with the team, safe and sound. Not much happens around these parts anyway, so you won't miss much by being cautious. About the only thing of importance that happened all winter, as far as I could learn from Crispay at the station, is something which ought to make a lot of Jaycees happy. Not me, though. I never minded much." It was a long speech for the meteorologist—when he wasn't telling stories.

"What's that? What happened?" Ralph demanded.

"No more occupation. The Earthmen left Jayc, every last one of them."

Ridiculously for a moment Ralph was aware of laughter echoing silently inside his head, mocking

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him. Kaloy's sentience, all at once, seemed sharper than it had been for a long time. It was as if the meteorologist's statement had stirred the Jaycee host from the fringes of a kind of cataleptic trance which he'd only left, of late, to ridicule and annoy.

Ralph's own emotions surfaced seconds later, wildly incredulous. It was a mistake—an insane rumor. It *had* to be a mistake.

"What are you talking about?" he cried. "Withdrawal of the occupation forces is impossible, and you know it."

The meteorologist clicked indifferently. "I don't care, either way. That's what they told me. Why, does it disturb you?"

Not me, thought Kaloy. *You've ruined my life, Earthman. This is an unexpected turnabout, is it not?*

Laugh now, Ralph told him bitterly. *Go ahead and laugh. We'll be sharing this body the rest of your life. Laugh if you think that's funny.*

You're going to be a monster. Kaloy went on mocking him. *The rest of your life. You always considered me a monster secretly, didn't you? You're a crippled monster yourself now.*

Shut up, said Ralph. Then, aloud: "Sure, it disturbs me. Here, let me at that radio."

Kaloy, who apparently believed the meteorologist, did not try to stop Ralph as he frantically beamed the call letters of the Earth occupation headquarters, repeating the signal over and over but getting no response.

"Can't this radio reach Comoy City?" he finally asked, an almost human tremor in his Jaycee voice.

The meteorologist clicked in thought, then said, "Only rarely. The waves are short and are usually trapped here in the mountains. Is it important?"

"Do they have a news station in Mountainvale? Call it for me, please." And, moments later, Ralph was saying anxiously, "This is Desmar Kaloy at the weather station on Halbady Peak. No, I'm not the meteorologist. I was a victim of the monorail crash."

Would the Jaycee never stop asking questions? "I'd like some information," he went on urgently. "Yes, you'd call it routine news." He wanted to shout, *it's not routine to me.* The Jaycee was switching him to someone else. Would he wait? Damned red tape, as bad as the Army's.

"Ah. Yes, this is Kaloy. I know. I was referred to you by the operator. Thank you. What information do you have on the departure of the Earth occupation forces?"

Kaloy had retreated again, burrowing deep into the stratum between conscious and subconscious. Ralph had learned the trick, too. It was like sleep, but far more restful to the mind, and it affected the body, the shared body, not at all. There, in that strange half-state, you could conjure up dreams at will. At first Ralph had thought it an at-

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tribute of the Jaycee brain, but in more pleasant days, soon after the crash, Kaloy had assured him it was the result of two minds sharing one body.

"Here we are," said the Jaycee in Mountainvale after a brief pause. "Sixteen days ago, after being so ordered by the Interstellar Confederacy, the Earth Army of Occupation was withdrawn from Jayc. The removal from their host bodies of almost two million alien Earthmen was carried out without serious incident. A preliminary psychological examination of the hosts indicates that one-third of them will need psychological readjustment and the Jaycee Government has therefore put into continuous operation its forty-six rehabilitation camps all over the world. Dr. Ruy Orty, director of the camps, declared that—"

"No, no!" Ralph clicked. If Jaycees had possessed sweat glands, he'd have been bathed in his own perspiration. "Don't you have anything else on the Earthmen?"

"Well, let me see. Yes, here's something. Lieutenant-General Willis B. Eichler, Commander-in-Chief of the Earth Army of Occupation, extended his heartfelt thanks to the authorities and people of Jayc, saying, 'Your sincere cooperation assured the success of this mission. It is hoped by the people of Earth and the other worlds of the Interstellar Confederacy that Jayc is now ready to take its place in the community of worlds as a morally responsible member planet. We wish you all good luck for the future.' "

"Anything else?" Ralph clicked desperately. "Were there any snags, any delays in the withdrawal?"

"I seem to remember something. Are you preparing a thesis? Splendid subject . . . ah, here we are. A final survey by the occupation forces revealed that eight hundred and seventy-six occupation soldiers were unaccounted for. This number was reduced drastically when rural area reports filtered in to the Earth caretaker forces—"

"Caretaker!" Ralph gasped. "Is someone left?"

"I'm coming to that. Rural reports revealed that some seven hundred and forty-three hosts had died natural and violent deaths during the occupation, their Earth 'guests,' of course, perishing with them. Unaccounted for: one hundred and thirty-three occupation soldiers. Considering the scope of the operation, the Occupation Information Office said that the casualties were . . ."

Ground static drowned out the Jaycee's clicking while Ralph twirled the dials in a frenzy of frustration. When the clicking Jaycee's speech could be heard again, it was faint and hard to follow. "Such negligible losses . . . cooperation of the Jaycee people. It has been speculated . . . fifty percent of the so-called casualties . . . adjusted to Jaycee life and refused to return."

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"I can't hear you." Ralph pleaded. "I can't hear you. What about that caretaker force? Are they still waiting?"

". . . detachment of Earth specialists at the T.M. Station, Comoy City. Stragglers . . . are asked to communicate with . . . them at once. Any Jaycee with information leading . . . of the stragglers . . . will be rewarded."

"How would you like some of that reward money?" Ralph cried. "You see, I'm an Earthman. I've been trapped here on Halbady Peak since the monorail accident and—"

"Hello, Halbady Peak. Hello, Halbady! Can't hear you. Mountainvale to Halbady Peak. Hello, Halbady Peak. Halbady—".

"You've got to hear me. How long is the caretaker force going to stay on Jayc? *How long?*"

Squawk. And a rushing sound, as of wind . . .

IV

"I couldn't help overhearing you," the meteorologist said. "If there is something I can do to help—"

"You can do plenty," said Ralph.

A pleasant if monotonous lethargy had possessed him since the accident, but now he felt suddenly vital and alive. If Kaloy had been aware of the conversation with Mountainvale, the Jaycee gave no indication. Perhaps, Ralph abruptly found himself thinking, Kaloy had been responsible for the lethargy.

"You can tell me the best way to get to Mountainvale. You can try to repair this radio, and contact the authorities. You can . . ."

"I'll do everything within my power," the meteorologist interrupted. "But it's very common for the cold to snap our aerial, and outdoor boosters at this time of the year. You'd better do what you have to do and forget about the radio, although I'll be trying to fix it after you're gone."

The meteorologist hopped to a cabinet, and returned with a map of the area. "Take this with you. Of the three passes between here and Mountainvale, the one on the east is usually the best in late winter. The distance is almost two hundred miles, though, and in your condition I wouldn't advise the trip."

"What do you want me to do, be stranded here?"

"He mentioned a caretaker detachment—"

"And didn't say how long it would stay. They're liable to take my own body back to Earth, over three hundred light years away. Or destroy it, I don't know which."

"What do they do with your body while you're a Jaycee, anyway?" the meteorologist asked.

"It's kept in a suspension vat," Ralph replied while he studied the map. "Womb-like. Its breathing is stopped, its heart slowed, and it is fed and given oxygen through an artificial umbilical cord. All the perception areas of the brain are

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blanked out, so that only that part controlling heartbeat and other automatic functions remains active. There's no perception at all. They can keep it up indefinitely, and the body hardly ages at all. But it's expensive and after they give all the stragglers enough time to reveal themselves, or after they conduct a search, all the remaining bodies will probably be destroyed."

"Pardon me for saying so, but that sounds cruel."

"Yes and no," said Ralph. "For the individual, yes. For his family, his wife if he has a wife, it is merciful! You see, his family does not know if he's dead or alive. Not knowing, they can't live normally. So he's declared missing in the line of duty, then declared dead after a certain amount of time has elapsed."

"Once more, Ralph had that odd feeling of unexpected objectivity, as if he were talking about some one other than himself. It was, he surmised, the location of sentience which counted. Right now he was far more interested in the well-being of Desmar Kaloy's exoskeletonal body.

A while ago it had been quite the other way around. But that had been strictly an I-don't-want-to-admit-I'm-not-human response. If Kaloy died, he would die. He wanted to return to his own body and would use Kaloy to any extreme short of death to do so. But . . .

Shouldn't I have something to say about that, Ralph Cook?

Did you hear our conversation?

Most of it. I'm not sure I liked what I heard.

Surely you'd be glad to see me go?

I'm not sure. You'd better look to your own welfare.

Ralph found himself walking with the odd hopping gait of the Jaycees to a mirror on the far wall of the room. He stood there and turned slowly, examining himself.

I see you're unimpressed. Just as you would be if an animal of your world had a shortened leg or a limp, or a twisted body. It may be injured, but you don't regard it as an ugly cripple or freak. You only regard your own species in such a light. To you I'm a damaged vehicle. In my own eyes—in the eyes of my people—I'm ugly, deformed, someone to be stared at and pitied.

Ralph thought, *I don't see what that has to do with my staying or leaving.*

I was going to take a vacation, to forget the war, down at Seaside Moors. I never would have taken the monorail for Central Terminal. It was your fault. If I have to live with this deformity, why shouldn't you?

"I can give you heavy mountain garments and a supply of food concentrates," the meteorologist was saying. "There is a sledge and two *ixors*, hibernating, in the basement. You can start out any time you wish."

"At once," said Ralph. *Ixors*, he

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knew with knowledge borrowed from Kaloy, were almost man-sized insects of burden which ordinarily burrowed underground and slept through the winter. "How do we wake up the *ixors?*"

"With stimulants. It's dangerous, and they usually don't survive very long. But it's done in emergencies."

Tense moments later, Ralph was wolfing down a hot meal, his last until the *ixors* pulled his sledge through the pass to Mountainvale. The meteorologist was busy stirring the giant insects from their season-long slumber and Kaloy had retreated again to the edge of the subconscious.

The injured Jaycee, Ralph suspected, might pose a problem more vexing than the snow and ice. If Kaloy really wanted him to stay—it seemed incredible, but the Jaycee evidently needed psychological help—the difficulty might develop into a contest of will between them. And the Jaycee, being more familiar with their body, might be expected to gain the upper hand.

Bundled in a bulky, shapeless garment which was fastened by draw strings at each of his six extremities beneath an overlapping water-proof slicker, Ralph waited impatiently for the meteorologist in the numbing wind outside the eyrie. Securely attached to the back of his thorax was a pack of food concentrates, emergency medical supplies and a reserve slicker. The toboggan-like sledge, its long graceful sweep of surface flush with the snow for increased distribution of weight, was barely wide enough to accommodate the broadest part of Ralph's Jaycee abdomen.

Presently the meteorologist emerged from the lower level entrance of the eyrie, which reared its gleaming dome massively over their heads. He was coaxing along the still-sluggish *ixors,* which resembled huge, stubby grasshoppers, with thick, brittle hindlegs folded almost double down the length of their abdomens.

"Do they jump?" Ralph demanded anxiously.

The meteorologist clicked humorously. "You bet they jump. You'll be strapped in. A soft Earth body couldn't stand the ride. A Jaycee can. I don't know about an injured one."

"I'm healed."

"Perhaps. Don't expect the fractured junctures to be as strong as the rest of you, though. I only hope you don't re-break part of your skeleton." The meteorologist commenced harnessing his *ixors* to the sledge with thick, leathery thongs.

"They're usually quite docile," he pointed out. "But under the influence of the stimulant, they're somewhat unpredictable. Here you are." And he handed Ralph a small packet containing a dozen tubes of amber liquid and a long-needled syringe. "If they display torpor, inject this at the base of the thorax armor. Don't try any other place or you'll snap your needle."

Ralph nodded, fastening the

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packet to his slicker by means of a barbed hook. Then he settled himself on the toboggan, secured himself with the double strap fastened to its edges and firmly grasped the thongs trailing from the *ixors'* harness with his forearms.

"Well," he said. "I guess I'm ready."

The meteorologist checked his straps, draped a blanket across his abdomen and clicked with concern. "Good luck to you, Earthman," he said. "And, for the mutual good of our people, take care of your host."

"Thank you," Ralph said. "I'll try."

You'll never make it to Mountainvale in time to contact your friends, Kaloy told him spitefully.

Ralph released the harness, jiggling it experimentally up and down. The eyrie leaped away from him, the ground streaking down and back on either side. To his utter consternation the sledge alighted fifty yards away with a tremendous jolt, shaking his exoskeleton. Fearfully he shook himself, and found all areas intact. But before he could regain his composure the *ixors,* far from torpid, were underway again.

V

Jayc's twin suns had come out brightly here in the high mountains for the first time all winter, kindling the snowy peaks with fires of green and saffron yellow. The pass to Mountainvale was a steep-walled gorge, possibly the bed of some ancient frozen river which had carved its way down to the foothills, melted and rushed on across the plains to Lake Comoy or to the sea far beyond.

But now the gorge was bare-walled, its rock strata reflecting the green and yellow suns in dazzling brilliance. The icy bed itself was a blinding saffron mirror, except where some of the taller sunward peaks cast their cold dark shadows across its gleaming immensity.

The Jaycee exoskeleton, Ralph soon learned, could cushion most of the shock of the *ixors'* great, fifty-yard leaps. The insects seemed tireless, pausing only long enough to gather their strong hind legs under them before taking off. Incredible seemed the ease with which they alighted on their runner-like thighs, and glided silently across the ice for several hundred yards, the sledge trailing easily behind them on its taut harness straps.

Down behind the western mountains dipped the suns of Jayce, summoning first emerald twilight and then dusk and darkness. Ralph halted the *ixors,* munched on some food concentrates with stiff, frozen mandibles, activated the sledge's small heating unit, wrapped himself snugly in blanket and slicker, and fell almost instantly into the dreamless asleep of utter exhaustion.

When he awoke, the *ixors* were lying motionless on the ice. All of his prodding and shaking could not

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stir them. But almost miraculously the syringe of stimulants had them hunched, and ready in a matter of minutes. While eating, he probed his mind for Kaloy's consciousness, but he could not find it. The Jaycee still slumbered, although dawn had long since fingered the higher peaks with green, and the brittle cold air was knife-edged and invigorating.

On the second night, Ralph dreamed that the *ixors* still labored forward in seven-league leaps. When he awoke, feeling hardly rested at all, he saw that a light, powdery snow had fallen. He dreamed the same dream on the third night, and the fourth. He felt exhausted, as if he hadn't slept in days. He attempted to evoke Kaloy's consciousness, but was not successful.

He had estimated the *ixors'* progress at some fifty miles daily at the very least, which meant that they should have already reached Mountainvale. Since there was no way out of the pass, it seemed incredible that they could be lost.

Kaloy, he pleaded. *Kaloy, can something be wrong?*

No answer.

Kaloy, listen to me. We'll have no food left if we don't reach Mountainvale soon.

Still no answer.

There was nothing to do but inject the *ixors* with stimulants again, and keep moving. He poised the syringe over the first insect's thorax—and deliberately held it there, not actively resisting the downward motion, or the plunging of the needle into the flesh at the base of the creature's exoskeletonal armor. The needle slipped in almost instantly, the syringe was depressed. Kaloy was in no trance, cataleptic or otherwise.

You did that. I didn't, Ralph thought. *Stop playing games.*

Why don't you let me sleep? came in spiteful protest.

We slept all night.

There was the thought of laughter. Then: *You slept all night.*

What about you, Kaloy?

I have been sleeping days.

The enormity of what Kaloy had done did not at first occur to Ralph. *Then I did not dream that the* ixors *moved by night! You drove them at night. Thank you.*

More laughter.

But in that case, we certainly should have reached Mountainvale long ago.

Our food is almost gone, Ralph Cook. By one third of the distance we are closer to Halbady Peak than to Mountainvale. We'd best return there before we starve.

Do you hear, Ralph Cook?

When Ralph understood, he slammed his forearm down in blind rage and frustration on the surface of the sledge. He longed for his own bipedal body. He wanted to stand there, at home in it, and throttle Kaloy. But you couldn't strangle a tracheae-breathing Jaycee by choking him. Nor could you expect a Jaycee's motivation to be

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clear to you, even if you shared his alien body.

You've doubled back on our trail every night, Ralph accused his host. *After the first day, we went practically nowhere. Why did you do it?*

There was an explanation, but to Ralph it seemed monstrous. Ralph had said that the caretaker force couldn't be expected to remain at Comoy City forever. Kaloy had been injured—crippled—and he held Ralph responsible. Kaloy wanted Ralph to suffer too. Kaloy thought that, in time, Ralph would come to accept the alien Jaycee body as his own. Then Ralph would suffer with his host.

There would be time enough to think about Ralph's own Earth body later, if at all. If it wasn't too late already. Did Kaloy think it was too late? Kaloy didn't know. Ralph knew more about such matters than Kaloy did. Kaloy was quite willing to let circumstances unfold themselves in their natural and inevitable fashion.

It's your body, Ralph pointed out. *Mine only temporarily. When you volunteered for occupation, you promised to cooperate.*

The occupation is history. I am a free agent. How was I to know I'd only be interned four months more if I hadn't volunteered?

Was it self-pity which motivated the Jaycee?

Well, Ralph thought again, *it's your body. Your body, my vehicle, call it want you choose. We're going to Mountainvale. I'm not going to sleep at all and the food won't last. But we'll get there. You brought this on yourself.*

But I'm convalescing. I can't take the strain, the lack of food—

You should have thought of that sooner.

The *ixors* bounded forward. The harness straps tightened. The sledge leaped away.

He was, after all, as much Desmar Kaloy physically as Kaloy was himself. He ached atrociously from the exoskeletonal armor of his thorax to the stout claws of his hindlegs. Every time the sledge alighted he wanted to scream but, lacking vocal cords, had to settle for clicking instead. And hunger twisted his entrails and tightened nerves which, already overloaded with the intolerable animosities of two conflicting personalities, threatened to snap altogether.

The newly-healed body conveyed messages of sleep. The tired brain wanted to accept them, but Ralph rebelled. Soon he came to distinguish between two different kinds of sleep, and so could manage an occasional uneasy nap. When the demands of the body became too great, when his muscles were possessed by a leaden lethargy, and his head lolled against his thorax, it was safe. For then Kaloy must sleep too, and Ralph only had to worry about awakening ahead of him.

But when it was the brain which thought of sleep, conjuring images

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of Ralph's own slumbering body which somehow—like a poorly executed painting—were not quite correct, not fully in proportion, not altogether human—then he had to remain awake at all costs, often rubbing his sensitive antennae stalks with snow until Kaloy's attack passed.

Once Kaloy had awakened from the body slumber first, and when Ralph became aware of his surroundings was calmly and expertly smashing the syringe against the edge of the toboggan, maliciously spilling its amber contents on the snow. A disaster more dreadful could hardly have been imagined. The *ixors* were in stupor and would remain in stupor—either perishing that way or going into deep hibernation again. There was nothing to do but leave the sledge and set out on foot with barely enough energy remaining to take each painful hopping stride.

Fatigue crossed the threshold of perceptive awareness. The ice, the snow, the jagged peaks, the coming of dusk and the desperate, brief moments of slumber, the first green suggestion of dawn, and the ordeal of plunging on—all became a hazy, obscurely experienced nightmare. Kaloy had, for the time being, given up any attempt to interfere. Kaloy, who could thus sleep through it all, was lucky.

In a dream-like torpor, Ralph followed the pass as it angled sharply down and to the left. Perhaps, he thought vaguely, in their native state before they had conquered the environment and themselves, the Jaycee were accustomed to hibernate. Perhaps . . .

The cliffs on either side of him dropped away. The pass—a road now—became clear of ice and snow. Ahead were small hills. No—the mounds of a settlement! There was the rich verdant green of seasonless mountain plants, the evergreen smell as of some magically transplanted valley of Earth. And there were figures coming toward him, Jaycees, reaching out and catching him before he could stumble and fall.

There was something he wanted to tell them. Something more important even than rest and sleep and a warm soup to drink. There was something . . . If only he could remember! He slept.

He was feverishly dreaming again. In his torment he sensed that much time had passed, and had half-formed memories of a Jaycee hospital and of a long, drug-induced slumber. No, he was not dreaming in a total sense. He could now feel the difference between a dream and an action of his Jaycee body while he slept. Kaloy at least was awake. He had come a long way through streets embanked with snow, through dimly-lit passages which, he suspected, were taking him ever deeper underground.

He wanted to wake up completely, but could not. But Kaloy was awake and thinking, *I'll stop him once and for all. If he tells his story,*

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the authorities will be contacted, and we'll be on our way back to Comoy City.

At last he stood in a warm, damp chamber, thick with a moist greenish haze which hid the high-vaulted ceiling and shadowed the far walls. Suspended from the unseen roof and hanging within reach of his forelimbs was an intricate network of criss-crossed girders, with a thick, leathery pod as big as his body attached to each angled juncture. There were scores of the brown-gray things, hundreds of them.

He probed Kaloy's thoughts desperately. Cocoon? Chrysalis? An earlier stage of Jaycee life, developing underground, undergoing metamorphosis, waiting to emerge with the blossoming summer as full-grown Jaycees? He had never seen Jaycee children. Were these, then, the children, the earlier stage? He wished he had paid more attention to his Troop Information lecturer. He sincerely wished he had.

His right forelimb was clasping a long knife. He was reaching swiftly upward now, grasping one of the giant pods, pulling the swaying leathery thing down toward him. Desperately he tried to awaken, to stop the quick, thrusting motion of his limb. But Kaloy fought him back.

Ralph plunged the blade home, ripping a deep slash in the pod. The instant he stepped clear a pulpy yellow liquid began to drip from the opening. Faster it spilled and faster, gathering into a spreading hideous pool at his feet. He clicked loudly and insistently, and soon other Jaycees were hopping frantically toward him, taking the knife from him, wrestling him to the damp floor as he struggled.

If only he could make them understand, if only he could tell them it was Kaloy, not Ralph Cook of Earth who had done this horrible thing. If only he could let them know there were two of them, fighting for control of the shared, tormented brain. But he fought on, and they carried him, writhing and kicking, from the vault. As if in compassion someone administered a hypodermic, and he relaxed at once. He could think for himself now, lucidly. But the Jaycee body would not obey his commands. Frustrated, he could do nothing but wait.

He was deposited on a reclining perch, then drugged again. Didn't they know that time was working against him? Why wouldn't they let him talk? He lost consciousness.

VI

Ralph Cook awoke to see Jaycee faces peering at him. Mandibles clicked excitedly, forelimbs waved in his face. He listened, numb with horror, utterly sick at heart.

"The pupa he attacked is dead."

"He's ill. He couldn't have known what he was doing."

"Well, we've sent for the regional psychologist from Central Terminal."

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"You still think he should be tried and executed?"

"I do. The circumstances indicate cold, cruel premeditation. You don't just stumble into the incubator vault."

"No, you don't. But if he's ill and can be cured—"

"I suggest we let the psychologist decide."

"If he can be exorcised—"

"Don't tell me you believe that story we got from Halbady Peak? I'm not blaming the meteorologist, understand. But if he's an Earthman, why didn't he say so before? He was there four months."

"He's waking! He hears us!"

"I *am* an Earthman," Ralph said. "I didn't say so because I was under command of absolute secrecy."

"There, I told you! We ought to send him to Comoy City to be exorcised."

"We'll let the psychologist decide. I think the Earthmen are already gone, anyway."

"Call them," Ralph pleaded. "Please call them. Maybe there's still time."

"All right, let's assume you *are* an Earthman. Did you kill the pupa? Surely your host wouldn't have done it."

"I did not," Ralph told them. "Desmar Kaloy was trying to delay me. I guess he thought if he committed so serious a crime I'd never get away."

Try and persuade them to believe it, thought Kaloy.

"What you say doesn't make sense on two counts. In the first place, why should a Jaycee kill one of our pupa? In the second place, even assuming your statement to be true—which I don't grant for one minute—why on Jayc would he want you to stay? He'd want you to be exorcised, and good riddance."

See? came triumphantly from Kaloy.

"Are you from the police?" Ralph asked.

"No but my companion is. I'm a doctor."

"I demand that the caretaker detachment of Earth occupation forces in Comoy City be notified."

"You're not in a position to demand *anything.* We've sent for a psychologist who, with the necessary apparatus, should be able to determine your identity."

"And meanwhile I just wait?"

"You just wait."

"But in even a few hours it may to be too late."

They ignored him, turning their backs and clicking in low tones between themselves. The room was white and bare, unfurnished except for his perch. He asked Kaloy if the psychologist really would be able to tell. When the answer was a glum and reluctant affirmative, he began to feel somewhat better. It was a minor victory, anyway.

Half an hour later, the psychologist arrived, unclothed. Obviously the Jaycee was a female. Even when he borrowed Kaloy's familiarity with his own people, Ralph still

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found it almost impossible to tell one Jaycee from another.

"Desmar Kaloy!" the female psychologist cried in surprise. "Is it really you?"

Ralph suddenly remembered that the female he had met on the monorail had been a psychological social worker. Psychologist? In Mountainvale the terms would be synonymous. What was her name? Ayd—Ayd Setay.

"Hello, Ayd Setay," he said. "I'm glad to see the accident hasn't left its mark on you."

"I was just shaken up a bit. They let me care for you as far as the eyrie. Then I went on to Central Terminal alone. We've been busy rehabilitating former hosts, and won't be finished for a long time. What seems to be the trouble with you?"

"Look at me," he clicked despondently. It was not Ralph now, but Kaloy speaking. "Look at me. Scarred, hideously crippled—a monster. They—should have let me die."

Ayd Setay clicked her sympathy. "A litle exoskeletonal surgery can do wonders, after you're fully healed."

"That wasn't me," Ralph clicked in alarmed protest. "I never carry on like that."

But Kaloy added, "It's just that I must be a pitiful sight in your eyes."

Ayd Setay clicked something—barely audible—about a split personality, then went into conference with the doctor and the police officer. Presently another Jaycee entered the already crowded room, carrying a small drum set, with graph paper and stylus, on a metal stand.

"I'd rather you didn't do this," Ralph heard himself saying.

"It's harmless," Ayd Setay assured him. "Won't take a minute. There, now."

A metal brace went swiftly over his head, and was clamped tightly at the sides with a sticky salve. From somewhere, he heard the hum of electricity. The drum began to rotate slowly, the stylus to trace a line on the graph paper.

A few moments later, Ayd Setay was telling the doctor: "An electroencephalogram doesn't lie. Earthman and Jaycee share Desmar Kaloy's body."

Unperturbed, the doctor said, "Then it becomes a question for the courts to decide. Unless, through careful psychological testing, you can determine who actually was guilty of the crime."

"Perhaps I could. But it might well take months—unless they both cooperated. As a psychological social worker, my first allegiance is to the Jaycee, Desmar Kaloy. But as a citizen of Jayc my first allegiance must be toward our world."

"I don't follow you."

"We'll have to do what is right in the eyes of the Interstellar Confederacy," clicked Ayd Setay. "Desmar Kaloy can be rehabilitated—or

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punished—later. But first the shared body must be sent to Comoy City to be exorcised."

"You'd let the Earthman go free after destroying one of our pupa?"

"This wasn't Earth's war, but her people have suffered several hundred casualties."

"You're talking like an Interstellarist."

"I don't think so. I'm trying to do what's best for Jayc. I'm taking the Earthman—and Desmar Kaloy—to Comoy City."

"Is the caretaker detachment still there?" Ralph asked anxiously as the apparatus was removed from his head.

"I've heard they're getting ready to leave." Ayd Setay clicked. "But we'll call, and tell them you're coming."

"And they'll wait?" It was Kaloy asking the question.

"There's no reason why they shouldn't. Of course—"

But Ralph answered himself emphatically. "Of course they'll wait."

Ayd Setay clicked her interest. "My scientific curiosity says I ought to keep him here. What a study he would make! You'll notice the way the two personalities, Jaycee and alien, argue in the one shared brain."

"I'll tell you all about it," Ralph promised. "Just call Comoy City, and get me there."

"It is clearly the court's right to decide," protested the doctor.

"Hardly," clicked Ayd Setay. "I'll sign a writ of *dokay maj*, if that will satisfy you. Desmar Kaloy is not responsible for his actions and is in need of mental treatment."

Ayd Setay was gone for perhaps half an hour, while doctor and policeman clicked together, obviously debating. Kaloy was sulking again, especially when the policeman was heard to say that the writ was perfectly legal under the circumstances. Kaloy was losing ground.

The deeper Kaloy burrowed into funk, the more optimistic Ralph began to feel. It seemed completely a mater of routine now. In days—and perhaps less—he would be safely back in his own body, rocketing toward the rehabilitation center on Arcturus IV, the whole nightmare of Jayc forever behind him.

Once there, solaced and healed by the sunlit tropic sea, mellowed by heady Antarean wine, he might even feel sorry for Desmar Kaloy, who had never been able to adjust to the occupation.

When Ayd Setay returned, she signed the writ giving her control over Kaloy until such time as his psychological rehabilitation could be completed.

"Incidentally," she clicked, "I've contacted the caretaker detachment in Comoy City. Incredible as it may seem, they want to give me a reward."

"I want to be punished," Ralph heard himself clicking. "I murdered a pupa and demand to be punished. You can't make me go to Comoy City."

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"There,' said the doctor. "You see?"

"That was Kaloy," Ralph protested. "Not me—Kaloy."

Ayd Setay clicked, "I've already reserved our perches on the Comoy City monorail, and the sooner the Earthman is back where he belongs, the sooner we can start with Desmar Kaloy's rehabilitation."

"And eventually punish the wrong individual," protested the doctor.

"That's quite enough," Ayd Setay clicked impatiently. "I'm going to pack a few things. I'll call for the patient later this afternoon. Meanwhile, give him this sedative, and please don't disturb him any more than is necessary."

The sedative was injected into Ralph's quivering thorax. He slept.

VII

He dreamed of Arcturus IV, where he was telling an attractive hostess from Earth all about his adventures on Jayc, embellishing them considerably, and enjoying every moment of his triumph to the full. Presently, however, the Earth girl's long-lashed eyes were replaced by lidless Jaycee orbs, the full red lips by clicking mandibles. It was the Mountainvale doctor, leading him along the streets of the small city.

This was no dream, Ralph suddenly knew. The doctor was saying, "I called the caretaker detachment and apologized, telling them it was a false alarm. There is a doctor I know in Central Terminal who can exorcise you properly. He is the man to call upon under the circumstances."

"Why are you doing this?" Kaloy demanded.

"Because it seems incredible to me that you could have committed that crime. Because in exorcising you our way we will also execute the Earthman."

"Perhaps I don't want that."

"Now you're joking."

"I'm not. Just look at me—an ugly cripple, for life. I want the Earthman to suffer with me. In time he'll accept this body as his own, and realize how terribly deformed he has made it."

Ralph's struggle was hardly physical, but it left him exhausted. He struggled desperately to awaken, to protest, to point out that now he was legally Ayd Setay's charge, and that anything they did with him would be illegal. He remained aware only—sentient but powerless. For the first time he found himself siding with Kaloy. His host's way would at least give him time. The doctor's way was a short monorail trip to Central Terminal—and death.

"I'm not questioning the legality of what you propose," the doctor clicked. "Morally, however, I believe I am doing the right thing. It will be my way or not at all."

Ralph groaned inwardly.

"But don't you understand? I have no desire to live unless the

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occupation soldier can live with me and learn to suffer as I must."

"You're being melodramatic," said the doctor. "Once exorcised, you'll feel better. Come along."

"Please. Just hide me somewhere, until the caretakers leave Jayc. I'll work out my own future."

"Your mind is possessed," declared the doctor superstitiously. "Come along with me and be exorcised."

"He's stirring," Kaloy clicked. "I can feel him trying to waken."

"Then hurry."

"If he goes free I have no wish to live."

"He won't go free," the doctor promised. "He'll perish."

"I want him to suffer."

The debate had cost Kaloy his control over Ralph, who could feel it slipping slowly, who could feel his way along the nerve fibers again, and through the motor regions of the brain. Control came not all at once but slowly, and he wondered if Kaloy could feel the extent of his returning powers.

I'm winning, he thought.

Abruptly he turned and fled down the street, the doctor's frantic clicking fading swiftly as he darted around a corner and kept going. Kaloy fought him furiously every step of the way, frustrating the muscles, issuing contradictory orders.

He stumbled on, wondering a little wildly if the Jaycees ever became intoxicated and deciding that if they did he must have presented the aspect of a thoroughly drunk individual.

His whole body burned painfully as, like laboring lungs, the tracheae gulped increasing quantities of oxygen to keep him going. He realized fully then why the Jaycees were a comparatively sedentary people, and hoped the doctor would not pursue him too vigorously. Of course, the doctor could call ahead to the monorail station, but the law was on Ayd Setay's side, even if public opinion might not be.

The city of mound-like dwellings bounced and tilted crazily about him as he hopped along from street to street, the motion rendered more erratic by Kaloy's attempt to thwart his flight. He paused just long enough to ask a pedestrian the location of the monorail station, then plunged on.

Officials met him at the station and held him while he clicked and swore, and informed them they were breaking every law on Jayc and in the Interstellar Confederacy as well if they didn't let him contact Ayd Setay or the Earth caretaker detachment in Comoy City. The doctor had called, they said. The doctor had told them to hold him if he appeared at the station. They would listen to the good doctor.

The doctor, as it turned out, was Ayd Setay! Eschewing her billowing wraps as soon as she was warmed by the station heaters, Ayd Setay said, "When you weren't at that doctor's place I didn't know if they had taken you somewhere else

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or if you'd come here to meet me, or even if that split-personality of yours had acted up. I rushed right over."

"A little of each," Ralph said, explaining what had happened.

The caretakers—by now somewhat bewildered — were called again. Everything, including Ralph's body, was in readiness. Now they said they were from Missouri, Ayd Setay informed Ralph, whatever that meant. First he was, then he wasn't, then he was again. Would he please hurry?

He certainly would. With Ayd Setay he boarded the monorail and was soon whisked across the Jayc landscape, suspended almost a hundred feet off the ground on the monorail cable, watching the great mountains and then the fertile plains of Jayc unfold below him.

The war, Ayd Setay admitted, had been a Jaycee mistake, an impetuous attempt at imperialism in an age of interstellar cooperation. The resulting occupation, if anything, had brought Jayc closer to the main stream of interstellar civilization. For that her people were grateful, and hoped to make the most of it. Would he carry that message back to Earth and the rest of the Interstellar Confederacy? He would be delighted.

He settled back comfortably and watched the scenery below him—and fought against Desmar Kaloy's hatred.

I'll never let you get away, Kaloy had thought, and kept on thinking. It sounded fantastically like the vow of a lover.

Kaloy would take no food. Ralph wasn't hungry.

If you can't suffer, I don't want to live. I should have let the doctor kill you.

Ayd Setay sympathized with Ralph but admitted her first concern was for Kaloy's welfare. The Earth caretaker detachment would administer to Ralph's needs soon enough. Kaloy, however, refused to talk with her, even after she had Ralph recline on his perch in their compartment to try free-association.

Ralph grew hungrier but couldn't hold down his food. It was not for many hours longer, he told himself. See the bright side of things. Be cheerful. You'll be leaving Jayc for good soon.

I'll kill you first.

"Perhaps the death-wish is for himself as well," Ayd Setay suggested. "Minds are sometimes damaged during occupation. He refuses to adjust to his deformity and blames it on you. Would you care for a sedative?"

"Thanks, but no." Ralph had had quite enough of Jaycee sedatives. He would remain awake all the way to Comoy City if he could help it. Time enough for him to worry about the mental fatigue later.

The afternoon wore on and faded into emerald dusk. Ayd Setay took her evening meal in the passageway adjoining their compartment since the sight and smell of food now made Ralph ill. He had

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needed sleep ever since his wild flight through the streets of Mountainvale to the monorail station. But now he would forego it until they reached Comoy City.

He'd sleep in his own human body, all the way to the Arcturus System if necessary. No, he'd gorge himself on good food first, on succulent roast fowl and pork shoulder stuffed with good old Earth chestnuts and—he gagged and thought of something else.

Kaloy laughed inside their head, then was silent. Entirely too silent.

VIII

Ayd Setay was asleep on her own perch, an ungraceful lobster-mantis in repose. It was hardly possible to think of her as a sentient creature —which foolishness, Ralph thought wryly, was probably responsible for the Jaycee war in the first place, with the Jaycees casting the same anthropomorphic limitations on their nearest interstellar neighbors.

He found himself half dozing and wished he had thought to take along some reading tapes. He slid back the ground observation panel, but could see only vague shadows flitting by below in the faintly greenish moonlight. He tried the skyport and had better luck.

The rush of air on his face, the crisp cool night air of Jayc, the faraway roaring of wind, parted by the first car of the monorail. He tried to shake himself awake—and failed. He was acting, moving about on Kaloy's volition, not his own. Trying to remain awake so long had been a mistake. He should have trusted Ayd Setay, who was becoming an Interstellarist without realizing it. Now it was too late.

Now Kaloy had left their compartment and was in the passageway paralleling it in the monorail car. In the dim light, Ralph could see doors leading to other compartments, all closed. The only open door led outside, to the moonlight, to the rushing wind, cold and green and to the ground far below.

He wanted to shout. No, to click. Damn semantics, anyway. The fascination was his as much as Kaloy's as he approached the doorway and poked his head out into the knifing wind.

A shudder passed over him.

It was exactly like fiighting dream-impulses, he thought with the frightening objectivity which at times was part of his strange parasitism. In a dream you stood at the edge of a cliff and you knew you were going to fall. A part of your mind, dim and labyrinth-lost, but half aware of the fact you were dreaming, tried to stop you. You groped forward with one foot, letting it dangle. You waited.

This was no dream. This was Desmar Kaloy's death-wish, and death for the final member of the Army of Occupation. His own personal occupation swirled by in seconds, the long line at the checkpoint, the first monorail journey, the crash, the mountain eyrie and the

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months of healing on Halbady Peak. Then the long trek to Mountainvale which had almost ended in death, Kaloy's crime, the ethnocentric doctor, Ayd Setay's test, his flight, Kaloy's death-wish and his inability to eat or even think of food, and now this—

He was leaning out over green darkness, buffeted by the wind. It would make a wonderful story to tell over a few tall ones on Arcturus IV and later back on Earth, but he would never tell it. He would die here on the plains of Jayc and for a short time be grist for the mill of interstellar politics until he was forgotten. He would never see his own body again, let alone dwell in it. He would never explore the worlds with its five senses, never eat the foods he had dreamed about until Kaloy's death-wish had precluded all thought of food.

He paused on the brink of nothingness and retreated a fraction of an inch. Kaloy's hold was weakening, for some inexplicable reason. Kaloy was rested, he was not. Kaloy should have exercised his influence without too much trouble, yet for one moment Ralph had felt control in his own hands.

The food.

He dreamed of eating, of being served dish after dish by armies of uniformed waiters on Arcturus IV. He breathed the aroma of food and fingered it with his hands and wallowed in it and rolled over and over in cooked mush, steaming and pungent.

He retreated another step and gagged. He gagged on steak, on gamey Arcturan antelope, on sauces and wines and rarebits. He gagged again and retreated and thought of maple syrup, straight from some New England tree, sweet and viscous, of milk, frothy and animal-warm, of a milking stool and a bucket there in the barn, with the smell of fodder thick in his nostrils.

He gagged and was sick there in the passageway. He made it back to his compartment and had Ayd Setay fetter him to his perch and didn't let her untie him all the way to Comoy City, although Kaloy pleaded and cajoled.

They met him there by the lake, the bipeds, the men of Earth, familiar and beautiful. Soon they took his body from a vat and there was complex apparatus which could separate the electromagnetic vibrations of his own sentience from Kaloy's and restore them.

And soon he was standing and stamping his feet and pinching himself in delight and demanding a mirror so that he could see himself and more mirrors than they had, and all the mirrors in the universe.

Ayd Setay led Kaloy away and he felt a brief pang of regret before he realized Kaloy was Ayd Setay's problem, not his. He let the men of Earth lead him to the spaceship, where they plied him with endless questions.

Instead of answering, he followed his nose to the galley.

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the triflin' man

by . . . Walter M. Miller, Jr.

Lucey hated the hex women and the herb healers in the swamps. But most of all she hated the wicked, triflin' man from space.

THE RAIN SANG light in the sodden palmettos and the wind moaned through the pines about the unpainted shack, whipping the sea of grass that billowed about the islands of scrub. The land lay bathed in rain-haze beneath the pines. Rain trickled from the roof of the shack and made a rattling spray in the rivulets under the eaves. Rain blew from the roof in foggy cloudlets. Rain played marimba-sounds on the wooden steps. A droopy chicken huddled in the drenched grass, too sick to stir or seek a shelter.

No road led across the scrublands to the distant highway, but only a sandy footpath that was now a gushing torrent that ran down to an overflowing creek of brackish water. A possum hurried across the inundated footpath at the edge of the clearing, drenched and miserable, seeking higher ground.

The cabin was without a chimney, but a length of stove-pipe projected from a side window, and bent skyward at a clumsy angle. A thin trail of brown smoke leaked from beneath the rain-hood, and wound away on the gusty breeze. In

Every so often—and especially when a story as somberly magnificent as this arrives on our desk—our editorial sobriety gets a little out of hand. Perhaps we can't honestly say that Walter M. Miller has written the most broodingly compelling story of atmospheric wizardry and eerily dark enchantment we've ever published. But we're prepared to nominate him as a contender for that distinction, and let you do the deciding.

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the cabin, there was life, and an aura of song lingered about the rain-washed walls, song as mournful as the sodden land, low as the wail of a distant train.

Whose hands was drivin' the nails O Lord?
Whose hands was drivin' the nails?
Lord O Lord!
My hands was drivin' the nails O Lord!
My hands was drivin' the nail!
And I did crucify my God!

The song was low and vibrant in the cabin, and Lucey rocked to it, rolling her head as she sang over the stove, where a smoked 'possum simmered in pot-likker with sweet-taters, while corn bread toasted in the oven. The cabin was full of food-smells and sweat-smells, and smoky light through dusty pains.

From a rickety iron bed near the window came a sudden choking sob, an animal sound of almost unendurable torment and despair. Lucey stopped singing, and turned to blink toward the cry, sudden concern melting her pudgy face into a mountain woman cherub's face, full of compassion.

"Awwwwwww . . ." The sound welled unbidden from her throat, a rich low outpouring of love and sympathy for the sallow twitching youth who lay on the yellowish sheets, his eyes wild, his hands tensing into claws.

"Awwwww, Doodie—you ain't gonna have another spell?" she said.

Only a small hurt this time, my son. It can't be helped. It's like tuning a guitar. You can't do it without sounding the strings, or pulsing the neural fibers. But only a small hurt this time. . . .

The youth writhed and shuddered, stiffening into a puppet strained by steel springs. His back arched, and his muscles quivered. He flung himself suddenly into reflexive gymnastics, sobbing in small shrieks.

Lucey murmured softly. An immense mass of love, she waddled toward the bed in bounces of rubbery flesh. She bent over him to purr low in her throat.

"Poor Doodie . . . poor li'l Doodie. Mama's lamb."

The boy sobbed and thrashed. The paroxysm brought froth to his lips and jerked his limbs into cramped spasms. He jerked and writhed and tumbled on the bed.

"You jus try to lay calm, Doodie. You jus try. You gonna be all right. It ain't gonna last long, Doodie. It's gonna go away."

"No!" he whimpered. "No! Don't touch me, Mama! *Don't!*"

"Now, Doodie . . ."

She sat on the edge of the bed to gather him up in her massive arms. The spasms grew more frantic, less reflexive. He fought her, shrieking terror. She lay beside him, moaning low with pity. She enveloped him with her arms, enfolding him so that he could no longer kick. She pulled his face into the hollow of her huge bosom and

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squeezed him. With his tense body pressed tightly against the bulky mass of her, she melted again with love, and began chanting a rhythmic lullaby while he twitched and slavered against her, fighting away, pretending to suffocate.

Gradually, as exhaustion overcame him, the spasm passed. He lay wheezing quietly in her arms.

The strings are tuned, my son, and it was only a small hurt. Has the hurt stopped, my son?

Yes, father, if only this monstress would let me be.

Accept my knowledge, and be content. The time will come.

"Who you whisperin' to, Doodie? Why are you mumblin' so?" She looked down at his tousled head, pressed tightly between her breasts.

His muttering ceased, and he lay quietly as if in a trance. It was always so. The boy had fits, and when the paroxysm had passed, he went into a rigid sleep. But it was more like a frozen moment of awareness, and old Ma Kutter said the boy was "witched." Lucey had never believed in "witchin'."

When he was tensely quiet, she tenderly disengaged herself and slid off the bed. He lay on his side, face toward the window, eyes slitted and mouth agape. Humming softly, Lucey returned to the stove and took a stick of oak out of the bucket. She paused to glance back at him—and he seemed to be rigidly listening to something. The rain?

"Doodie. . . ?"

"When are you coming for us, father?" came in a ghost whisper from the bed. "When, *when?*"

"What are you talking about, Doodie?" The cast-iron stove-lid clattered on the hot metal as she lifted it nervously aside. She glanced down briefly at the red coals in the stove, then back at Doodie.

"Very soon . . . very soon!" he whispered.

Lucey chucked the stick of wood in atop the coals, then stood staring at the bed until the flames licked up about the lid-hole to glisten orange on her sweat-glazed face.

"Who are you talkin' to, Doodie?"

She expected no answer, but after several seconds, his breathing grew deeper. Then it came: "My *father.*"

Lucey's plump mouth went slowly shut and her hand quivered as she fumbled for the stove lid.

"Your pa is dead, Doodie. You know that."

The emaciated youth stirred on the bed, picked himself up slowly on one arm, and turned to look at her, his eyes blazing. "You lie!" he cried. "Mama, you lie!"

"Doodie!"

"I hate you, Mama, I hate all of you, and I'll make you pay. I'll be like *him.*"

The stove-lid clattered back in place. She wiped her hands nervously on her dress. "You're sick, Doodie! You're not right in the mind. You never even *seed* your pa."

"I talk to him," the boy said.

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"He tells me things. He told me why you're my mother. He told me how. And he told me who *I* am."

"You're my son!" Lucey's voice had gone up an octave, and she edged defensively away.

"Only half of me, Mama." The boy said, then laughed defiantly. "Only half of me is even human. You knew that when he came here, and paid you to have his baby?"

"Doodie!"

"You can't lie to me, Mama. *He* tells me. *He* knows."

"He was just a man, Doodie. Now he's gone. He never came back, do you hear?"

The boy stared out the window at the rain-shroud. When he spoke again, it was in a small slow voice of contempt.

"It doesn't matter. He doesn't want you to believe—any of you." He paused to snicker. "He doesn't want to warn you what we're going to do."

Lucey shook her head slowly. "Lord, have mercy on me," she breathed. "I know I done wrong. But please, punish old Lucey and not my boy."

"I ain't crazy, Mama."

"If you ain't crazy, you're 'witched,' and talkin' to the dead."

"He ain't dead. He's Outside."

Lucey's eyes flickered quickly to the door.

"And he's comin' back—soon." The boy chuckled. "Then he'll make me like him, and it won't hurt to listen."

"You talk like he wasn't a man. I seed him, and you didn't. Your pa was just a man, Doodie."

"No, Mama. He showed you a man because he wanted you to see a man. Next time, he'll come the way he *really* is."

"Why would your pa come back," she snorted, summoning courage to stir the pot. "What would he want here? If you was right in the head, you wouldn't get fits, and you'd know you never seed him. What's his name? You don't even know his name."

"His name is a purple bitter with black velvet, Mama. Only there isn't any word."

"Fits," she moaned. "A child with fits."

"The crawlers, you mean? That's when he talks to me. It hurts at first."

She advanced on him with a big tin spoon, and shook it at him. "You're sick, Doodie. And don't you carry on so. A doctor's what you need . . . if only Mama had some money."

"I won't fuss with you, Mama."

"Huh!" She stood there for a moment, shaking her head. Then she went back to stir the pot. Odorous steam arose to perfume the shack.

The boy turned his head to watch her with luminous eyes. "The fits are when he talks, Mama. Honest they are. It's like electricity inside me. I wish I could tell you how."

"Sick!" She shook her head vigorously. "Sick, that's all."

"If I was all like him, it wouldn't

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hurt. It only hurts because I'm half like you."

"Doodie, you're gonna drive your old mother to her grave. Why do you torment me so?"

He turned back to the window and fell silent . . . determinedly, hostilely silent. The silence grew like an angry thing in the cabin, and Lucey's noises at the stove only served to punctuate it.

"Where does your father stay, Doodie?" she asked at last, in cautious desperation.

"Outside . . ."

"Gitalong! Wheah outside, in a palmetto scrub? In the cypress swamp?"

"*Way* Outside. Outside the world."

"Who taught you such silliness? Spirits an' such! I ought to tan you good, Doodie!"

"From another world," the boy went on.

"An' he talks to you from the other world?"

Doodie nodded solemnly.

Lucey stirred vigorously at the pot, her face creased in a dark frown. Lots of folks believed in spirits, and lots of folks believed in mediums. But Lucey had got herself straight with the Lord.

"I'm gonna call the parson," she grunted flatly.

"Why."

"Christian folks don't truck with spirits."

"He's no spirit, Mama. He's like a man, only he's not. He comes from a star."

She set her jaw and fell grimly silent. She didn't like to remember Doodie's father. He'd come seeking shelter from a storm, and he was big and taciturn, and he made love like a machine. Lucey had been younger then—younger and wilder, and not afraid of shame. He'd vanished as quickly as he'd come.

When he had gone, it almost felt like he'd been there to accomplish an errand, some piece of business that had to be handled hastily and efficiently.

"Why'd he want a son?" she scoffed. "If what you say is true—which it ain't."

The boy stirred restlessly. "Maybe I shouldn't tell."

"You tell Mama."

"You won't believe it anyway," he said listlessly. "He fixed it so I'd *look* human. He fixed it so he could talk to me. I tell him things. Things he could find out himself if he wanted to."

"What does he want to know?"

"How humans work inside."

"Livers and lungs and such? *Sssssst!* Silliest I ever—"

"And brains. Now they know."

"*They?*"

"Pa's people. *You'll* see. Now they know, and they're coming to run things. Things will be different, lots different."

"When?"

"Soon. Only pa's coming sooner. He's their . . . their . . ." The boy groped for a word. "He's like a detective."

Lucey took the corn bread out of

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the oven and sank despairfully into a chair. "Doodie, Doodie . . ."

"What, Mama?"

"Oh, Sweet Jesus! What did I do, what did I do? He's a child of the devil. Fits an' lies and puny ways. Lord, have mercy on me."

With an effort, the boy sat up to stare at her weakly. "He's no devil, Mama. He's no man, but he's better than a man. You'll see."

"You're not right in the mind, Doodie."

"It's all right. He wouldn't want you to believe. Then you'd be warned. They'd be warned too."

"They?"

"Humans—white and black and yellow. He picked poor people to have his sons, so nobody would believe."

"Sons? You mean you ain't the only one?"

Doodie shook his head. "I got brothers, Mama—half-brothers. I talk to them sometimes too."

She was silent a long time. "Doodie, you better go to sleep," she said wearily at last.

"Nobody'll believe . . . until he comes, and the rest of them come after him."

"He ain't comin', Doodie. You ain't seed him—never."

"Not with my eyes," he said.

She shook her head slowly, peering at him with brimming eyes. "Poor little boy. Cain't I do somethin' to make you see?"

Doodie sighed. He was tired, and didn't answer. He fell back on the pillow and lay motionless. The water that crawled down the pane rippled the rain-light over his sallow face. He might have been a pretty child, if it had not been for the tightness in his face, and the tumor-shape on his forehead.

He said it was the tumor-shape that let him talk to his father. After a few moments, Lucey arose, and took their supper off the stove. Doodie sat propped up on pillows, but he only nibbled at his food.

"Take it away," he told her suddenly. "I can feel it starting again."

There was nothing she could do. While he shrieked and tossed again on the bed, she went out on the rain-swept porch to pray. She prayed softly that her sin be upon herself, not upon her boy. She prayed for understanding; and when she was done she cried until Doodie was silent again inside.

When she went back into the house, he was watching her with cold hard eyes.

"It's tonight," he said. "He's coming *tonight,* Mama."

The rain ceased at twilight, but the wind stiffened, hurling drops of water from the pines and scattering them like shot across the sagging roof. Running water gurgled in the ditch, and a rabbit ran toward higher ground. In the west, the clouds lifted a dark bandage from a bloody slash of sky, and somewhere a dog howled in the dusk. Rain-pelted, the sick hen lay dying in the yard.

Lucey stood in the doorway, nervously peering out into the pines and the scrub, while she listened to the

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croak of the treefrogs at sunset, and the conch-shell sounds of wind in the pines.

"Ain't no night for strangers to be out wanderin'," she said. "There won't be no moon till nearly midnight."

"He'll come," promised the small voice behind her. "He's coming from the Outside."

"Shush, child. He's nothing of the sort."

"He'll come, all right."

"What if I won't let him in the door?"

Doodie laughed. "You can't stop him, Mama. I'm only *half* like you, and it hurts when he talks-inside."

"Yes, child?"

"If he talks-inside to a human, the human dies. He told me."

"Sounds like witch-woman talk," Lucey said scornfully and stared back at him from the doorway. "I don't want no more of it. There's nobody can kill somebody by just a-talkin'."

"*He* can. And it ain't just talking. It's talking *inside*."

"Ain't nobody can talk inside your mother but your mother."

"That's what I been saying." Doodie laughed. "If he did, you'd die. That's why he needed *me*."

Lucey's eyes kept flickering toward the rain-soaked scrub, and she hugged her huge arms, and shivered. "Silliest I ever!" she snorted. "He was just a man, and you never even seed him."

She went inside and got the shotgun, and sat down at the table to clean it, after lighting a smoky oil lamp on the wall.

"Why are you cleaning that gun, Mama?"

"Wildcat around the chicken yard last night!" she muttered. "Tonight I'm gonna watch."

Doodie stared at her with narrowed eyes, and the look on his face started her shivering again. Sometimes he did seem not-quite-human, a shape witched or haunted wherein a silent cat prowled by itself and watched, through human eyes.

How could she believe the wild words of a child subject to fits, a child whose story was like those told by witching women and herb healers? A thing that came from the stars, a thing that could come in the guise of a man and talk, make love, eat, and laugh, a thing that wanted a half-human son to which it could speak from afar.

How could she believe in a thing that was like a spy sent into the city before the army came, a thing that could make her conceive when it wasn't even human? It was wilder than any of the stories they told in the deep swamps, and Lucey was a good Christian now.

Still, when Doodie fell asleep, she took the gun and went out to wait for the wildcat that had been disturbing the chickens. It wasn't unChristian to believe in wildcats, not even tonight.

Doodie's father had been just a man, a triflin' man. True, she couldn't remember him very clearly, because she had been drinking corn

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squeezins with Jacob Fleeter before the stranger came. She had been all giggly, and he had been all shimmery, and she couldn't remember a word he'd said.

"Lord forgive me," she breathed as she left the house.

The wet grass dragged about her legs as she crossed the yard and traversed a clearing toward an island of palmetto scrub from which she could cover both the house and the chicken-yard.

The clouds had broken, and stars shone brightly, but there was no moon. Lucey moved by instinct, knowing each inch of land for half a mile around the shack.

She sat on a wet and rotting log in the edge of the palmetto thicket, laid the shotgun across her lap, stuffed a corncob pipe with tobacco from Deevey's field, and sat smoking in the blackness while whippoorwills mourned over the land, and an occasional owl hooted from the swamp. The air was cool and clean after the rain, and only a few nightbirds flitted in the brush while crickets chirped in the distance and treefrogs spoke mysteriously.

"AAAaaaAAaaarrrwww . . . Na!"

The cry was low and piercing. Was it Doodie, having another spasm—or only a dream? She half-arose, then paused, listening. There were a few more whimpers, then silence. A dream, she decided, and settled back to wait. There was nothing she could do for Doodie, not until the State Healthmobile came through again, and examined him for "catchin' " ailments. If they found he wasn't right in the mind, they might take him away.

The glowing ember in the pipe was hypnotic—the only thing to be clearly seen except the stars. She stared at the stars, wondering about their names, until they began to crawl before her eyes. Then she looked at the ember in the pipe again, brightening and dimming with each breath, acquiring a lacy crust of ashes, growing sleepy in the bowl and sinking deeper, deeper, while the whippoorwills pierced the night with melancholy.

. . . "Na na naaaAAAAhhhaaa. . . !"

When the cries woke her, she knew she had slept for some time. Faint moonlight seeped through the pine branches from the east, and there was a light mist over the land. The air had chilled, and she shivered as she arose to stretch, propping the gun across the rotten log. She waited for Doodie's cries to cease.

The cries continued, unabated.

Stiffening with sudden apprehension, she started back toward the shack. Then she saw it—a faint violet glow through the trees to the north, just past the corner of the hen house! She stopped again, tense with fright. Doodie's cries were becoming meaningful.

"Pa! I can't stand it any closer! Naa, naaa! I can't think, I can't think at all. No, *please*—"

Reflexively, Lucey started to bolt for the house, but checked herself

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in time. No lamp burned in the window. She picked up the shotgun and a pebble. After a nervous pause, she tossed the pebble at the porch.

It bounced from the wall with a loud crack, and she slunk low into shadows. Doodie's cries continued without pause. A minute passed, and no one emerged from the house.

A sudden metallic sound, like the opening of a metal door, came from the direction of the violet light. Quickly she stepped over the log and pressed back into the scrub thicket. Shaking with fear, she waited in the palmettos, crouching in the moonlight among the spiney fronds, and lifting her head occasionally to peer toward the violet light.

She saw nothing for a time, and then, gradually, the moonlight seemed to dim. She glanced upward. A tenuous shadow, like smoke, had begun to obscure the face of the moon, a translucent blur like the thinnest cloud.

At first, she dismissed it as a cloud. But it writhed within itself, curled and crawled, not dispersing, but seeming to swim. Smoke from the violet light? She watched it with wide, upturned eyes.

Despite its volatile shape, it clung together as a single entity as smoke would never have done. She could still see it faintly after it had cleared the lunar disk, scintillating in the moonglow.

It swam like an airborne jellyfish. A cluster of silver threads it seemed, tangled in a cloud of filaments —or a giant mass of dandelion fluff. It leaked out misty pseudopods, then drew them back as it pulled itself through the air. Weightless as chick-down, huge as a barn, it flew —and drifted from the direction of the sphere in a semi-circle, as if inspecting the land, at times moving against the wind.

It was coming closer to the house.

It moved with purpose, and therefore was alive. This Lucey knew. It moved with its millions of spun threads, finer than a spider's web, the patterns as ordered as a neural array.

It contracted suddenly and began to settle toward the house. Glittering opaquely, blotting out half the cabin, it kept contracting and drawing itself in, becoming denser until it fell in the yard with a blinding flash of incandescent light.

Lucey's flesh crawled. Her hands trembled on the gun, her breath came in shallow gasps.

Before her eyes it was changing into a manlike thing.

Frozen, she waited, thinking swiftly. Could it be that Doodie was right?

Could it be—

Doodie was still whimpering in the house, weary now, as he always was when the spasm had spent itself. But the words still came, words addressed to his father.

The thing in the yard was assuming the shape of a man—and Lucey knew who the man would be.

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She reared up quickly in the palmettos, like an enraged, hulking river animal breaking to the surface. She came up shotgun-in-hand and bellowed across the clearing. "Hey theah! You triflin' skunk! *Look at me!*"

Still groping for human shape, the creature froze.

"Run off an' leave me with child!" Lucey shouted. "And no way to pay his keep!"

The creature kept coming toward her, and the pulsing grew stronger.

"Don't come any nearer, you hear?"

When it kept coming, Lucey grunted in a gathering rage and charged out of the palmettos to meet it, shotgun raised, screaming insults. The thing wobbled to a stop, its face a shapeless blob with black shadows for eyes.

She brought the gun to her shoulder and fired both barrels at once.

The thing tumbled to the ground. Crackling arcs danced about it, and a smell of ozone came on the breeze. For one hideous moment it was lighted by a glow from within. Then the glow died, and it began to expand. It grew erratically, and the moonlight danced in silvery filaments about it. A blob of its substance broke loose from the rest, and wind-borne, sailed across the clearing and dashed itself to dust in the palmettos.

A sudden gust took the rest of it, rolling it away in the grass, gauzy shreds tearing loose from the mass. The gust blew it against the trunk of a pine. It lodged there briefly, quivering in the breeze and shimmering palely under the moon. Then it broke into dust that scattered eastward across the land.

"Praised be the Lord," breathed Lucey, beginning to cry.

A high whining sound pierced the night, from the direction of the violet light. She whirled to stare. The light grew brighter. Then the whine abruptly ceased. A luminescent sphere, glowing with violet haze, moved upward from the pines. It paused, then in stately majesty continued the ascent, gathering speed until it became a ghostly chariot that dwindled. Up, up, up toward the gleaming stars. She watched it until it vanished from sight.

Then she straightened her shoulders, and glowered toward the dust-traces that blew eastward over the scrub.

"Ain't nothing worse than a triflin' man," she philosophized: "If he's human, or if he's not."

Wearily she returned to the cabin. Doodie was sleeping peacefully. Smiling, she tucked him in, and went to bed. There was corn to hoe, come dawn.

Report: Servopilot recon six, to fleet. Missionman caught in transition phase by native organism, and devastated, thus destroying liaison with native analog. Suggest delay of invasion plans. Unpredictability factors associated with mothers of genetic analogs. Withdraw contacts. Servo Six.

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hour of surprise

by . . . Evelyn Goldstein

No stranger mother ever existed on land or sea. Like seeds were her children, Time's gift to the brightest of human tomorrows.

WITH CRIES OF eager rejoicing the three children ran swiftly down the grey corridor to the lead-lined, steel-plated door that was gliding slowly open.

"It's Mother! Mother's home!"

Only Aram did not run. He stayed behind, on the threshold of the dorm-gym, his small fingers nervously twisting the neatly pressed folds of his smock.

"They must not tell her about my dream," he wished fiercely. He did not understand why, but suddenly he knew that his dream must be kept a secret, even from his Mother.

She was Inside now, the door closing with a finality that made his mouth feel parched. How closely she guarded the way to Outside! Half-formed suspicions, aroused and made almost unbearably tormenting by his dream, nagged at him. Was there really deadly danger outside? Or, was it only that she sought to keep them safe from curiosity and venture?

Mother stooped with a welcoming cry, gathering Helga and Roger to her in a radiant embrace. Lorna, who was eleven—a year younger

We have seldom read a story of tomorrow presenting a more startling view of the future than this, nor one told with quite such memorable tenderness in prose so magically lyrical. If you were thrilled by the vitality and suspense and heart-warming beauty of Evelyn Goldstein's THE RECALCITRANT *and* THE KILLING WINDS OF CHURGENON *we gently suggest you'll be thrilled anew.*

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than Aram—approached with the reserve of her more advanced years. Mother reached out a hand to press Lorna's. Then, as she lifted her head, she saw Aram.

"Aram?" Her voice was puzzled.

Aram looked at the beautiful metallic creature that was his Mother, her body seemingly perpetual and fluid motion with its endless, glistening coils, and iridescent facial orifices.

From the circle of her arms Roger looked over his shoulder to Aram. "Aw," he said, with an eight-year-old's candor, "he's still sulking from his dream."

"Dream?" Mother's hands fell away from the other children. "What kind of a dream, Aram?"

Aram stood very still. She came to him, her tall shadow falling across his shoulders. He knew that if he touched her she would feel cold, as she always did when she came back from Outside. Yet, she had assured him that Outside was a cruel, destructive world of flame and acid winds that would sear and kill him. She had lied. How could he answer her now?

"Aram wouldn't tell us his dream," Helga pouted.

Mother turned. "Helga, please go to the kitchen and start preparing the Third Meal."

The six-year-old trotted off obediently, and Mother promptly assigned Roger to the animals in the Barn Room, and Lorna to see to the temperature of the incubators, and hydroponics tanks. When they had run off to their tasks she motioned Aram into the dorm-gym. Together they sat on the bench facing each other, leaning their elbows on the long table of the "school."

"Aram, please look at me," Mother said.

Reluctantly he complied.

"Won't you tell me about your dream?"

He shook his head.

Gently she put her marvelous flexible fingers to his temples. How cool they were, and how radiantly the coils of her body glistened where the illumination from the recessed lights touched them. Points and sparks cascaded before Aram until his eyes became glazed and heavy.

"Tell me," Mother's voice was softly insistent.

"It was about—other people. Not people like you. People like *us*—but bigger, and older. There was one who was pretty like Lorna and I called *her* 'Mother.' And there was another . . . What does 'father' mean?"

"Hush." Mother's voice was like a lullaby now. "It was only a dream, only a dream to forget. Only a dream . . ." Her voice receded, leaving just the soft pressure at his temples, and after a while, his troubled mind cleared. Slowly his lids fluttered open. She smiled at him.

Shyly he smiled back. He'd had a bad dream. What was it? He couldn't remember. Good! It would not bother him now. He reached out,

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and gratefully took her hand. It was warm now, from Inside.

"I'm glad you're home, Mother."

Hand in hand they went back to the kitchen. Helga had the table set. There was a fillet steak from the inexhaustible supply of dehydrated meat, and a serving of shredded fish from the "pantry-room" that lined one wall of the kitchen. There were also tomatoes, and snap-beans that had recently ripened in the 'ponics tanks and milk chilled in the small atomic-powered refrigerator.

Mother pressed the soft-noted dinner chime, sending its tinkling echoes throughout the five-room of Inside. In a moment Roger and Lorna scurried into the kitchen.

Mother did not eat with them. Mother never ate—just as she never slept. Instead, she spent dinner hour in the sub-level in which was located the atomic unit that supplied their utilities.

Aram, being the eldest, had been many times at sub-level to help Mother check the series of lights and levers that made for smooth and continuous functioning of the complicated unit which towered to the ceiling of the glass room. For a long time, before his first visit to sub-level, Aram had dutifully studied the "ATOMIC PRIMER—AGE 10 to 15." Lorna had the book in *her* lesson assignment now.

"Did you tell Mother your dream?" Lorna inquired as they ate.

"Sure."

"Well," Roger asked, thrusting an impatient hand through his wavy, dark hair, "what was so mysterious about it then?"

"Mysterious?" What a funny thing for Roger to say! It had only been a bad dream. Why, he couldn't even remember it. But though Aram tried to dismiss the thought lightly, for some reason it troubled him.

The uneasiness followed him until sleeptime, hovering just beyond reach of his boyish comprehension, chilling and frightening him. When they had pulled their wall-beds to the floor of the dorm-gym, the other children leapt under the sheets, noisily talkative. But Aram responded absently when they tried to engage him in conversation.

Mother came in to dim the lights, and stop all talk. Then she went swiftly away down the hall. "Good sleeptime," she called back, her voice vibrant with a tender solicitude.

Aram's ears strained to the metallic sounds of her footsteps receding. He heard the almost noiseless sound of a door opening and closing, and knew that she was in the Closed Room.

Because it was forbidden to them the children often speculated as to exactly what the Closed Room contained. Something very precious, they had decided. Perhaps the secret of the origin of Inside. Perhaps, as Lorna had once wildly conjectured, it was a human incubator which someday would hatch out others like themselves, precisely as the in-

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cubators *they* tended hatched out chickens.

At the beginning the children had been untiring in their curiosity. But Mother's reply had always been the same. "You'll know when it is Time."

Time!

That insurmountable word, that intangible barrier that was ever present.

When the cow had calfed, and they had all missed a sleep period to watch the momentous event, Helga had cried: "Were we born that way, Mother?"

And Roger had scornfully replied, " 'Course not. We were seeds like the 'ponics tanks. And when we grow up we'll grow coils like you. Isn't that so, Mother?"

She had regarded them strangely. "You'll know when it is Time," she had promised, turning back to the unsteady calf.

"When will it be Time?" Aram had once asked.

"That depends."

On what did it depend? On Time? The circle went endlessly nowhere. And Aram lay abed, his eyes wide, his mind a squirrel cage of unceasing speculation.

He would have liked to talk to someone. Lorna, perhaps. She was certainly the easiest to talk to, not derisive like Roger, or childish, like Helga. But the soft even breathing from the bed opposite him told him that Lorna was as fast asleep as the others.

On impulse he rose, slipped his bare feet into moccasins, and went padding out into the corridor. In the semi-darkness he could see the slit of light from under the door of the Closed Room. He moved cautiously down the hall until he was standing directly before it.

There was no sound from within, but he knew that his Mother was moving about mysteriously on the other side of the barrier.

He had an almost irresistible impulse to knock, and dart inside the instant the door opened, solely to catch a glimpse of what lay forbidden in the room. But taboo was stronger than impulse, and he could not fight down the years of instilled obedience. Yet he had to see into the Room, *had to.*

His breath sounded loud to his ears, in uneven, sharp contrast to the rhythmic hum of the generators at sub-level.

The generators.

That was the answer!

Sharply he remembered Mother's words to him on his first trip to sub-level.

"Even though you've passed every test in your Atomics Primer studies, Aram, you must not touch anything here until you've watched me a number of times."

"Why, Mother? The book says emergency levers will go into operation instantly if any tampering throws the machinery out of gear."

She nodded. "That's true, Aram. But the change-over would take a few minutes. In that time the lights might go out, or the water be shut

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off, or the fuel lines clogged. So, for the time being, just watch."

Well, he had watched enough to know exactly which banks of relays and switches controlled specific utilities. Now he knew what he could do. But the monstrous idea made him shudder.

He moved swiftly back to dorm-gym, and crossed the room to where the "school" supply closet stood. The door creaked when he opened it, and he froze, his heart pounding. But nothing stirred, the creak being loud only to his own guilty hearing. His hand flashed to the shelf where the modeling clay was kept. In a moment he had a soft ball of it between his fingers and was again in motion.

Past the Closed Room he went, down the corridor that sloped to the Barn Room. He heard the animals stir uneasily as he passed, heard the little calf whimper.

Still moving cautiously, he forced his shivering feet to continue to a red-lit door that opened on a flight of descending stairs.

It took him only a minute to reach sub-level. Here, he moved with quickness and surety to the levers that generated pure water from subterranean streams. Swiftly he wadded the clay into the right controls. Then he hurried back upstairs to take up his position in deep shadows opposite the Closed Room.

He was listening so hard he almost failed to hear it—that first missed beat in the steady hum of the generators. Again came the soft, regular vibrations, followed by a missed beat. Hum, hum—miss—hum. The very strangeness of the uneven sound made Aram acutely aware of it.

Suddenly the door of the Closed Room burst open and Mother hurried out. Straight to the sub-level she hastened, leaving the forbidden portal standing wide.

Instantly Aram darted out of the shadows into the Room.

His first impression was one of disappointment. It was a small room, containing nothing but rows of book-lined shelves, and stacks of voice and film tapes such as they had in the "school." There were two pictures on the wall above the writing-desk. His temples pounding, Aram moved closer.

One of the pictures portrayed a being, like Aram, but taller, and dressed differently. The lettering under the portrait read: *Richard E. Calvert, President of the Western Hemisphere.*

The other picture was that of a female. She was also dressed in strange clothes, severe of styling, and her hair was dark, straight and short. The lettering read: *Olya Molkorchin, Executive-Commissar, Eastern Hemisphere.*

For a puzzled moment Aram looked at the pictures, then his eyes fell to a book which was lying open upon the desk. Keeping his finger inserted to preserve the place, he turned to look at the title:

HISTORY—*Third Atomic War to War of the Robots.*

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He flipped back to the open page. A paragraph caught his immediate attention:

. . . as Sperry's Robots, Inc. expanded mankind's elation turned to fear. With assembly lines turning metallic creatures out at twice Earth's birthrate speculation spread from whispers to newscast editorials. 'What will happen to Mankind?' 'Will Thinking robots become Masters instead of Servants?'

Aram flicked a page, and saw a photograph—a crude thing of stiff metal. *Marta, the first of Evart Sperry's successful robots,* the inscription beneath it read.

On the opposite page was another photograph labeled: *Latest type of Sperry robot,* and picturing a graceful creature of shimmering coils.

Mother!

There was a sick feeling inside Aram. In one hideous moment his dream swept back upon him. SHE was not his Mother—this pictured shape of metal and gears. She had been created by beings like himself. . . .

Was that a sound?

He whirled to the door. Was she returning? Should he run? Should he remain and face her?

Panic decided him. He turned and fled.

Back under the covers of his bed, lying trembling and perspiring, fevered with momentous knowledge, with dread realization, he wanted only to die.

"We are not her children. Thinking robots did become masters. We are her captives!", he sobbed, feverishly to himself.

Far down the hall he heard the sound of her walk again. His ears strained, and caught the even rhythmic hum of the generators. She had corrected the fault.

He closed his eyes quickly as her figure bulked in the doorway. He tried to breathe evenly and naturally as she came and stood over his bed. Through his closed lids he could feel her staring down at him. Why didn't she say something? Why didn't she go away?

"Aram," she said gently, "you should not have gone into the Closed Room. It was not-yet Time."

She pressed something into his lax hand, and went away. He did not need to look at the object he held. He knew what it was. The little ball of clay. . . .

Over the First Meal he told the others. But he did not expect the reaction he got.

"She is too our Mother," Helga loyally proclaimed, but her lower lip quivered as she fought back her tears.

Roger patted her reassuringly: "Don't listen to him. He's had so many dreams lately, he doesn't know what's real anymore."

"It wasn't a dream," Aram savagely insisted. He looked to Lorna in appeal. But even she was skeptical. He tried again: "Look, this is how I figure it. People like us created the robots. But they got out

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of hand. That's what the book called the War of the Robots. And that's what Mother means by Time. It isn't Time because the War is still on, and the Robots haven't won it yet."

"So what?" Roger challenged.

"So, until they win the war the Robots have to keep their prisoners from knowing there *is* a war. Otherwise we'd try to break out and help the people like us."

"Break out where?" Lorna asked.

"Why, Outside, of course."

"You're crazy," Helga cried, "Outside is a Bad Place, and burning. And besides," she rose defiantly.

"I won't listen to you!"

"Listen? Listen to what?"

The children started. Mother was in the doorway.

Helga ran to her. "Aram's crazy. And I don't care what he says—I love you, Mother!"

Roger also left the table: "Him and his dreams," he muttered.

"Again, Aram?" Mother said. Did he imagine the long speculative look she gave him?" Dreams again, Aram? We'll have to do something about that."

He stared at her, unable to move, unable to speak. His mouth was dry, his hands clammy. Fear rode him, black as a nightmare.

"He was only fooling." Lorna spoke for him. She made it seem an inconsequential thing. "He was only teasing, and Roger took him seriously."

Lorna turned to Aram. "You were only teasing, weren't you, Aram?"

Slowly he nodded. His voice came back, unnatural and high pitched. He turned it into a laugh. "Sure. Just teasing." But it sounded forced.

"We'll forget it then," Mother said. But there was no finality in her tone. "Lessons now. Into the dorm-gym."

She herded them before her. Aram hurried too, grateful for the reprieve.

He went dutifully through his lessons, forcing his attention to matters at hand. Arithmetic, reading. The text-book this time was called "Adventures in Hydropinics." Helga read a more elementary text—"The Day the Incubators Stopped."

Biology lesson was the cellular structure of the onion-skin—for Helga, and Roger. Aram and Lorna got their first glimpse of the book called "Human Biology." Mother said it would deal with the structure and composition of their own bodies.

Normally Aram would have been thrilled at this newest lesson, but now it only added to his apprehension. For, rustling through the pages, he realized that none of the illustrations depicted robots. Growth, from cell to whole, culminated in one thing—the beings of his dream—a skeletal structure upon which stretched flesh with veins and arteries bearing the captic. "MAN."

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Later, he and Lorna worked together over the incubators. He was so quiet she finally stopped to face him.

"Aram," she said, "is your dream still troubling you?"

He shook his head. He wanted desperately to confide in her, but caution kept him mute. Yet, he knew that he must have help for he had a plan, and only with assistance could he put it into effect.

At last he blurted, "Lorna, I've got to get Outside!"

She drew away from him. "Outside!" Even her unbelieving whisper sounded like a shout.

He glanced fearfully around, then stubbornly persisted, "I've got to find—" he groped for the word "—the others."

"You're sick, Aram." She put a hand on his arm. "Let Mother help you."

He pulled his hand away as though stung. "All right," he said bitterly. "If you won't believe me, if you won't help me, I'll do it alone. I'll find a way myself. But I'll get to Outside. You'll see I will!"

From then on he planned and plotted. He became obsessed. He thought of nothing else. Like the incessant generator hum, one word hammered in his brain—Outside! OUTSIDE!

His face grew thin, his dark eyes large with sleeplessness. He stammered over lessons, or fell to daydreaming. He was hardly aware of the day's tasks.

Lorna kept to his side, correcting any mistakes, concealing his aimlessness. But over all his concentration he was dreadfully aware of Mother, her curious featureless gaze upon him, studying him, seeming about to say something, then checking her words. . . .

Then, with unexpected suddenness, Mother announced she was going Outside.

Aram was stunned. It was too soon. It was sooner than she had ever gone before, and he was not ready. He had thought of nothing.

He was ready to cry with despair.

As always, she gave him last minute instructions.

"Bring us a surprise." Roger always said that.

"I hope so," Mother replied.

Helga kissed her. Lorna did too.

Aram stood like a statue, eyes on the door, longing tearing his heart out. Just to get Outside. . . .

How slowly the door moved open! He strained to see. Nothing but shadows. A hand touched his shoulder. Lorna whispered to him: "Get ready to run!"

Before his bewildered thoughts could coalesce, there was a shriek. He turned. Lorna, hands to stomach, had doubled up, and was screaming in agony. Then she fell writing to the ground.

"Lorna!" he took a step to her. But Mother was quicker. She knelt beside the fallen girl. "What is it? What's the matter?"

Nothing but moans.

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In that instant Aram understood. Nothing *was* the matter. Lorna was pretending. She had given him his chance. The door stood open.

Outside was unguarded!

Swiftly, on padded feet, he darted through the door. By the light from Inside he saw he was in a narrow corridor sloping upwards. Unhesitatingly, he ran ahead till the light grew dim behind him —till the light became completely cut off.

Utter darkness.

This thing he had never known. Fright came to him then, stark unreasoning panic. Fear such as he had never imagined enveloped him with arms that cut off his vision.

"It's a dream," he thought wildly. "Mother will wake me! Hurry! Hurry, Mother! Wake me!"

But—even in his panic—he knew that if Mother came Outside would be lost to him.

He touched the wall side. How rough it seemed. It scraped his hand cruelly as he made his way, by touch, through the darkness.

Up and up went the path, and never a blessed light to heal his gibbering mind. His feet ached upholding him, and his hands grew bruised with the wall sharpness. But, over his discomfort, above his terror, was the dogged will to reach his goal, to go Outside.

It came.

Unexpectedly, with a rounding of a curve, just as his knees were buckling with exhaustion, Outside was there. There in a first glimpse of light, brighter than he had ever known, round and yawning.

With a cry he put his hands to his eyes. The great light was as frightening as the intense dark. Slowly he peered through his fingers. Slowly, slowly the hurt from the sharp light dulled as his eyes accustomed themselves to the glare. Then he saw he was at an entrance. Hands still shading his eyes, he went Out.

Oh, the *immensity*!

Great rocks lay tumbled and stacked upon one another, and the blue endless ceiling above reached and arched a blown mantle about him. Hesitantly, he turned to look back the way he had come. The great hole gaped dark, urging him to return to the warm safety of Inside. Almost he was tempted.

Almost. . . .

He turned his back. He scampered away from the cave, sliding, slipping, scraping over the boulders, the rocks that littered the way.

How long did he descend? He had no way of knowing. Only suddenly he stopped, and became aware that the light had lessened. The ceiling above had changed, had deepened and grayed.

Wearily he went on. And when the rocks came to a slow end he stood on hard burnt, bitter earth.

He lifted his head and looked about. He squinted and strained. There was nothing to be seen—nothing but seared earth, cratered and humped and barren.

Doggedly he started forward.

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There was a wind upon him, and he shivered under the light smock. Outside was cold. Yet—Mother had talked of the burning. He looked at his feet, leaving no mark on the hard-packed ground. Once there had been a burning. He could see the signs all around, the scars of the time when Outside had been flames and acid winds.

He cried then.

He sat on a hump of black sterile earth, and put his head in his hands; and all the sorrow of a lost civilization was in his tears.

That was how Mother found him.

"Aram," she said, and lifted him easily. "You shouldn't have come when it wasn't Time."

But he could not answer for his sobbing strangled the words which trembled on his lips. So she spoke for him.

"Your dreams were true, you know," she said. "Your real mother was a human woman. And your Father was a great man—the greatest and the wisest—when there were still men."

Her voice held a world of remembrance and regret. "His name was Sperry. And he was my father, as he was yours. He saw the trend the world was taking, and he built Inside. He put you there when you were born, and he set me to guard and teach you. Lorna, and Roger and Helga came after, and I watched over them too. And he was right in all he did. For when Man burnt himself out, and tore the surface of the world to flaming ribbons only Inside withstood the catastrophe."

Aram's sobs had quieted. She held him close, rocking and pacing. "When the flames had died I came out. But no one—nothing was left. I went out in ever widening circles, taking with me seeds to throw upon the ground. Year after year, as you children were growing, I came out to see if the seeds had taken. But they never did. Earth was dead."

Her gaze sought the ground ceaselessly. "And, as long as life could only grow Inside I could not tell you of your Heritage. I could not give you sterile grounds, and traditional cruel wars as your birthright. So I had to tell you it was not Time."

All the while she spoke her restless pacing widened in area, her restless glance moved in automatic search. That was when she saw the small green sprout poking over the scar-black earth.

With a glad cry she ran forward and stooped, plucking a leaf and held the First Plant for him to see.

"Aram, it's TIME! At last, it's TIME! Earth isn't dead. There is hope now for Outside! At last—the surprise I promised Roger!"

And then she stopped. And then she smiled. For Aram, quite worn with his ordeal, had sobbed himself to sleep, arms flung hard about the black metal neck—even in sleep holding tight to his Mother.

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the house at the end of the street

by . . . Robert F. Young

The woman you'll never find is the woman you'll love eternally—if you're one of the lonely men on the barren slopes of Earth.

THERE IS A search which has endured through generations out of mind. It is a search in which you have participated if you are a man, and the extent to which you have participated is commensurate with the degree of your idealism.

It is a search for a being who is at once the incarnation of our memories and the embodiment of our expectations; of a being who is flesh and blood and yet not at all; who is simultaneously earthly and ethereal.

It is a search, for all we know, for a non-existent being. To my knowledge she has never yet been found. But the brief moments when we think we have found her are certainly the best moments that we know, and if our goddesses invariably turn out to have feet of clay, it is not to their discredit so much as it is to ours, for we, not they, have predicated their goddesshood.

Most men accept the non-existence of that which they cannot find and settle for baser metal. Somewhere in their late twenties or early thirties they cease to believe in god-

When we first read Robert F. Young's MISS KATY THREE *all of the visions of beauty which had haunted us from boyhood seemed to tremble again in evanescent splendor before our eyes. It was a little like dipping into Keats for the first time and reading of "magic casements opening on the foam of perilous seas in faery lands forlorn." We hoped right then and there that Robert Young's muse would flame again in the same unexpected and lyrically breathtaking fashion. It has, and in this brand-new yarn.*

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desses and marry the daughter of the butcher, the baker or the candlestick maker.

They, I suspect, are the complacent gray men we see about us every day, in crowded streets and crowded bars, in offices and commuter-copters. Yes, and in suburban living-rooms reading their eternal papers, or staring, like pallid ghosts, through the tinselly windows of their 3-D screens into the public lives of goddess-pretenders and pitchmen. In their way, I suppose, they are contented. Contentment is not a bad substitute for happiness any more than the daughter of the candlestick maker is a bad substitute for a goddess.

But there are a few of us who never stop looking. We staunchly continue to believe that some day we shall turn a springtime corner and see our goddess approaching us down the street, the wind in her hair and golden flecks of the sun in her eyes.

And though the years slip slyly by and we never do quite find her, the hope never diminishes, and some of us assuage our need by reading romantic novels, and others of us just wander about parks on summer nights, or along beaches in moonlight, the need never assuaged at all, but always there, waiting, waiting. . . .

That which follows is the story of a goddess—and an apology. If at first it seems to be a dissertation on loneliness, be patient, for goddesses and apologies and loneliness, as you will see, sometimes go hand in hand. And if it is not the kind of story you expected the first Plutonian to write, I can only say that that is because you have lived all your life in the third house from the corner and have never visited the house at the end of the street.

Unlike temperature, loneliness cannot be computed in degrees; but if there were a device to gauge its intensity it would hit its absolute low on the ice plains of Pluto.

The ice plains of Pluto are blue; not the blue with which you are acquainted; but a glinting malevolent blue, a hard uncompromising blue, an endless, hating blue. And on their horizon the sun is a little naked eye, pale and cold, hardly larger than the disdainful stars that surround it.

They go on and on, glinting and hating, unrelieved by the slightest shadow of a ridge, unsoftened by the faintest contour of a hill. Around them stretch the abysmal deeps of space—not the ordinary space that encompasses the inner planets, but the demoralizing darkness that confronts you when you reach the end of the street and turn your back on the pitiful radiance of the distant streetlight on the corner.

I got to know the ice plains very well. Eventually I came to accept them. But that was long after the second ship had come; long after the thirty-six hours I spent alone in the house at the end of the street.

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The *Stardream I* landed itself. Such a *modus operandi* is probably frustrating to romantics who remember the early days of space travel when pilots had to know how to operate their own ships. But romantics are invariably afflicted with temporal nostalgia. The old way, to them, is always the best way. I suspect that their ancestral counterparts were around a century ago, deprecating the advent of the first thoroughly automatic ford.

I constituted the ship's complement of one: Captain Stephen Carver—Point of Departure: Triton; Destination Pluto. A passenger rather than a pilot, though a very carefully selected passenger. But *not* selected because of any technological aptitude. The problems that arise in space and on unexplored planets are of a psychological, not a technological, nature, and the men who ultimately reach the stars will differ diametrically from the gimmick-minded swashbucklers who overran the moon and Mars.

After planetfall the first thing I did was to activate the locator beam. The *Stardream II* showed like a tiny blur on the detector screen, still some two million miles out. In a day and a half, if nothing went wrong, it would follow the beam in and come down to rest by the *Stardream I*. And if something did go wrong, Captain Speller, passenger on the *Stardream II*, could return with me to Triton in the *Stardream I*, provided, of course, that he survived planetfall. The two ship system is based on the noble proposition that ships are more dispensable than men.

The next thing I did was to don my suit, pass through the airlocks and descend the little Jacob's ladder to the surface. I needn't have done so. My orders did not include any extra-ship reconnoitering prior to Speller's arrival, and I already had seen the Plutonian landscape through the viewports during planetfall.

But man is a tradition-bound creature, and there is a deep-bedded symbolical significance in the minds of all of us concerning the contact of our feet with alien soil, especially when our particular feet are the first to make the contact. As the first Plutonian I simply had to stand, however briefly, on Plutonian soil.

Or rather, Plutonian ice.

So I stood there at the base of the ship, in the relative center of that Brobdingnagian plain, awaiting the exaltation that was my rightful reward for being the first man ever to set foot on the doorstep of Number 9 Solar Drive.

But it wasn't exaltation that I experienced.

Standing there I gradually became aware of a quality that the excitement of planetfall had crowded out of my initial receptivity. Standing there I really *saw*, for the first time, the immensity all around me. I saw the ice flats glinting bluely away to the inward horizon above which the travesty of the sun hovered; and away and away and

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away to the dark dull outward horizon that wasn't an horizon at all but an awesome place where the changeless terrain left off and the outer darkness began—the darkness that separates the house at the end of the street from the first house of the next town, four miles, or four light years away.

I had visited the other houses and I knew what aloneness, in its ordinary sense, was like. I was even cognizant, in a vague way, that the farther down the street you progressed, the more acute the aloneness became. But I was totally unprepared for the aloneness that crept in from those abysmal outer deeps and touched my marrow.

There is nothing I can compare it to; there is nothing in my experience that even approximates it. Try to visualize a vast silent plain compounded of ice and shattered starlight, then try to project yourself into the middle of it. Now imagine a bleak cold star above one horizon and let the information that that star is Sol sink into your mind; the same Sol that turns Earth skies blue, that creates the seasons, that is behind all sweet dawns and is an integral part of every sublime twilight. The Sol that is the sole progenitor of Day, that is responsible for every single blade of grass and every single patterned leaf—That little star on the horizon, that shoddy twinkle of lifeless light, that futile pentagram on the Cimmerian face of space; that remote streetlight on the corner that so warmly illumines the first three houses—

That star is Sol.

Imagine it if you can, and then try to imagine the emptiness that begins on the opposite horizon, an emptiness so illimitable, so prodigious, that it overextends its bounds between systems and creeps inexorably in over the Plutonian plains, a great dark mesmeric entity that suffuses you, that inundates you, that overwhelms you. . . .

When I got back into the ship I headed straight for the medicinal locker. There was whiskey there—a generous allotment. There was no reason why there shouldn't have been. Men do not set foot into space ships until they have been pronounced psychologically sound, and psychologically sound men do not abuse alcohol allotments. But it is possible to be psychologically sound amid a predictable set of circumstances and psychologically unsound amid an unpredictable set of circumstances.

I got thoroughly drunk. . . .

When I came out of it I was lying on the small lounge in the passenger compartment (it would be both romantic and inaccurate to call it a navigation room). My mouth was parched and there was an insistent throbbing going on in my brain. I got up miserably and stumbled in the general direction of the medicinal locker.

I would have been all right if it hadn't been for one thing. I would have washed down an anti-al tablet and in a matter of minutes

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my hangover would have been little more than an unpleasant memory, then I would have returned to the cozy compartment and taken my seat before the transmitter and the moment the *Stardream II* picked up the locator beam I would have established radio contact with Speller. I would have talked to him unremittingly about anything under the sun until the *Stardream II* came down to rest beside the *Stardream I* and there were two men on Pluto instead of only one.

I would have done all that and this story would not differ radically from the stories most spacemen tell, despite its portentous beginning—

If I had remembered to close the viewports.

As it was I got as far as the first one, and without thinking at all, with that same absence of conscious volition typical of all men when they pass windows of any kind, I looked out at the Plutonian plain.

There was a village lying there, where nothing had been before; the loveliest, the sweetest, the warmest village that I had ever seen. There were white houses and green lawns, and immaculate streets lined with elms and maples. In the center there was a park so green it hurt your eyes to look at it.

I stood frozen before the viewport. I did not believe in what I saw, yet I could not take my eyes away. Gradually I began to make out details. All of the houses had rose-trellised verandahs, in each front yard there was a French lilac tree in bloom, and in every back yard there was an apple tree in blossom.

The streets were deserted. So, apparently, were the houses.

Presently my eyes touched the outskirts. Impossibly, the green lawns and the immaculate streets left off and the ice flats began. The bright sunlight ceased to be, and in its stead the ice glinted, malevolently, hatefully, endlessly.

I brought my eyes back quickly and locked them on the charming houses, the exquisite yards; the hedges and the picket fences; the rambling, shaded streets. And suddenly such a poignant sense of *need* swept over me that I could not endure the lonely ship for another second, and I ran wildly from the compartment, down the companionway to the locks. At the threshold of the inner door I paused.

There was a remnant of reason still remaining in my mind. *My suit,* I thought. *My suit!* I got into it feverishly. I forced myself to check the oxygen intake dial, the pressure indicator and the thermometer, not because there was any likelihood that any of the built-in units were malfunctioning, but to reassure myself of my sanity.

I remembered that I had been drinking, and while it was improbable that a single bout with a bottle would bring about an hallucination of the proportions of the one I had just witnessed, it was equally improbable that the village could be

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real. But real or not, I had to investigate it.

I stepped into the closet-sized chamber and sealed the inner door. I depressed the stud that controlled the ponderous outer door.

There was a hiss, then a whoosh! of air, and there before me on the -350 degrees Fahrenheit plain was the summer village. If anything, it was more vivid and more real than it had been when I had seen it through the viewport.

The nearest street began perhaps a hundred yards from the ship, and I stumbled toward it. The moment I stepped upon its flagstone sidewalk, dazzling sunlight was all about me. Startled, I glanced up at the sky, and the sky was blue! A summer blue, a June blue, a morning blue . . . and a sweet haze-softened sun was rising above the red rooftops.

I stared at the nearest house. There was something strikingly familiar about it, its Martian Colonial lines, its nostalgic rose-trellised verandah— Suddenly I recognized it, and I was stunned.

For it was my boyhood home, the house I had been born in, the house I had lived in before I went away to school; and it was just exactly the way it had been when I was a small boy stalking Martians in the back yard and treeing Venerian *sphugi* in the apple trees. And next door to it was its identical twin, and across the street, its identical triplet.

I realized then that every house on the street was the same, every house in the entire village.

As I stood there, gawking like a schoolboy, a tall handsome man came down the walk, opened the gate of the picket fence and started down the street toward the center of the village. He was wearing a light pastel business suit and he was carrying a brief case. He looked right at me when he opened the gate but he did not see me.

But I saw *him*. His wide apart gray eyes, his slender nose and firm mouth; the unforgettable cleft on his chin. And I recognized him instantly.

Why shouldn't I have? He was my father.

I don't know how long I stood there—it is doubtful anyway if time could have been computed by orthodox standards in so unorthodox a situation—but presently I started moving down the street; cumbersomely, grotesquely, like some blundering deep sea diver in the midst of a delicate Atlantis. I received my second shock when I reached the gate. My mother came out of the house, descended the verandah steps and began to cut a bouquet of lilacs from the tree in the front yard.

The scene was so starkly vivid, so intensely distinct that it transcended reality. There was the blue summer sky showing above the red shingles of the roof; the white clapboard siding, the shutter-embellished windows, the open verandah (so popular then after

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its century of ostracism), the deep greenness of the lawn, my mother's scissors twinkling in the sun as she snipped the mauve blooms; my beautiful dark-haired mother herself—

Just as I remembered her.

Just as she had been all those absconded years ago. . . .

Presently she glanced up, but though she looked right at me she did not see me. There were particles of the sun in her blue eyes, but nothing else, and after awhile she returned them to her work. She snipped another lilac, added it to her bouquet, then went back into the house.

The oxygen intake dial, inset at eye level in my helmet, registered "Normal." But my chest was tight and I could hardly get my breath.

After a long while I moved on. When I reached the second house, a tall handsome man came down the walk, opened the gate and started down the street. He was wearing a light pastel business suit and he was carrying a briefcase. He had wide apart gray eyes, a slender nose and a firm mouth, and there was an unforgettable cleft on his chin. . . .

When I came opposite the gate, a lovely dark-haired woman came out of the house, descended the verandah steps and began to cut a bouquet of lilacs from the tree in the front yard. Her scissors twinkled in the sunlight.

And the next house. And the next, and so on down the street.

An entire village of my boyhood homes, peopled by facsimiles of my mother and my father just as they had looked when I was ten years old.

Regression? What else? How else does the mind react when confronted with a situation it cannot possibly cope with? Even in normal crises it is prone to return to a pleasanter situation, a situation that affords protection, that reassures. In an extreme crisis—absolute loneliness for instance—might it not multiply that happier milieu? Might it not only multiply it, but subjectively create it?

But regression is merely one phase of the mind's protective mechanism. There are many others, among them romantic invention.

The dream girl device. . . .

Quite unsuspectingly I came to the village park. White walks wound in and out of the sunlight, arabesqued with shade when they passed beneath the trees. There were polychromatic parterres, and white benches ensconced in shrubbery. Stately elms shouldered the summer sky.

But soft you now! The fair Ophelia!

Goddesses are many things to many men. Your goddess to me might seem too short, and mine, to you, too tall. Your goddess may have gray eyes, while mine has blue. Goddesses are strictly subjective phenomena.

I had started down one of the enchanting walks when I saw her. She was coming toward me out of

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sun and shadow. She was tall, and her hair was dark and short. She was wearing a mist-blue dress.

She was too far away at first for me to see her face, but I felt that I knew her, knew her from somewhere. As she neared me, the details around her subtly faded—trees, grass, shadows—and at the same time the sun seemed to increase its brightness, until finally there was utterly nothing in my perspective but this tall sun-burnished girl walking. It was like staring at a single object in a picture and having everything else in the picture become blurred and meaningless.

Presently, as the distance between us shrank, I began to see her face. It was a wide face, flawlessly molded. There were light-blue eyes flashing beneath thin dark bird wings of brows, a firm line of nose, a generous mouth, warm with the beginning of a radiant smile. It was a country girl's face and quite utterly beautiful, and though I had never seen it before I knew it very well.

How did I know it?

I knew it because I knew the memories and the associations that had shaped it.

I knew the tranquil evenings, and I knew the green hills that rise into the serene blueness of summer skies; I knew the quiet country roads. I knew the mists that accompany summer mornings and I knew the fields new-turned in spring. I knew meadow flowers and quiet laughter, and brooks bubbling in violet shade.

I knew the sweet smell of October vineyards and I knew the invigorating sharpness of November winds. I knew the creaking sound of snow on January nights, and I knew the first fresh breath of spring. . . .

She was a composite, a montage, a blend of all the moments when I had known beauty. She was the image that had shone unseen, deep in my mind, whenever I had looked at a pretty girl and turned disappointedly away. She was my hitherto unknown criterion.

She was more than that.

She was my own personal goddess; my Muse. And I had had to journey all the way to the house at the end of the street to find her. For the house at the end of the street is loneliness itself, and goddesses and loneliness, as I have said, sometimes go hand in hand.

She had almost reached me when the *Stardream II* arrived. It was an incongruous falling star, shattering the blue illusion of the sky. It settled down on dwindling geysers of jets and proudly took its place in the sun beside the *Stardream I.*

And suddenly my goddess began to fade away. Her face blurred, that lovely face, that goddess-face of memories and associations; and then her body, that tall goddess-body of Grecian symmetry and breasts in blossom—the whole exquisite creation of her shimmered,

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diffused, paled into transparency. . . .

And where the park had been, where the nostalgic village had stood, the ice plain reasserted itself, glinting malevolently away to the immensities, to the pale orb of the objective sun.

Confront the mind with absolute loneliness and it will create. It will create because it must create, because creation is its last resort against insanity, its ultimate defense mechanism.

But its creation is limited and it is conditioned. It is limited by the *a posteriori* factors of our individual existences, and it is conditioned by the habitual devices we employ to meet the lesser forms of loneliness. Regression and romantic invention.

When I stood for the first time on the ice plains of Pluto I knew that here was a loneliness I was unprepared to meet, that I could not endure. My conscious reaction was to drink myself into insensibility. My subconscious reaction was more complex.

Subconsciously, I came to a decision. Subconsciously, I decided that the next time I looked at those ice flats there was going to be a reassuring quality added to them through which their loneliness could not possibly penetrate. And when my transcendental logic processed my next retinal image of them, that reassuring quality had to be there.

And what is more reassuring to any man than his boyhood home? Than his mother and father? Than his goddess. . . .

The only time the mind will create is when it has to, and the length of time it will sustain its creation is as long, and no longer, than it has to.

Two men on Pluto can never be as lonely as one man on Pluto. Neither of them can experience *absolute* loneliness.

When I saw the second ship come down I knew that I was no longer alone. And my creation turned to dust.

I have said that in addition to being the story of a goddess that this is also an apology.

It is an apology to potential goddesses. To almost-goddesses. To my real goddess, if or when I ever find her.

For it is one thing to search for a goddess and not know what she is going to look like, and it is quite another thing to search for one and know exactly what she is going to look like. In the first instance you look subconsciously; in the second you look subconsciously *and* consciously.

I look for my goddess every day. I stroll morning streets and afternoon avenues. I have a penchant for parks, and you may have seen me sitting by some quiet lake, or wandering down some maple-arbored lane.

Searching.

Searching for my goddess—

Have *you* seen her?

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the strange room

by . . . *Algis Budrys*

We stood, at the technological peak of the Twenty-fourth century, masters of all we surveyed. The universe was ours, analyzed and recorded in our texts and filing cabinets, populated by our billions. But the consciousness of mastery is the beginning of its downfall, for of what use is further effort when the peak has been attained? And filing cards are treacherous in their assertion that they contain all the universe, for then Man may feel that the universe is no longer among the stars but securely arranged in alphabetical order.

—Dalkeith, J.H., ESSAYS

More numerous than a swarm of locusts had been the men and women of the dead Galactic Empire. But where . . . where were they now?

MACEDONIAN, an armed transport armed from habit only, left the Solar Union's advance staging base on Griffon in the middle of AD 2387, GST. As it left Griffon's star behind, James Dalkeith, graduate in xenolinguistics, sat in his cabin and wrote a letter to his wife.

"On a routine mission of minor importance, really. To be bluntly truthful, Harriet, nobody really expects us to learn anything new. And, should we be

Algis Budrys has so rare a talent for restoring to life and light and fire the often terrifying inhabitants of Galactic civilizations lost to human memory—civilizations that flourished when, to quote him directly—"The muddy bricks of Mesopotamia's ziggurats were still drying in the Babylonian sun."—that the utter magic of his prose often seems to elude analysis, the spell he weaves being one of almost hynotic enchantment.

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lucky enough to prove the skeptics wrong, I doubt if anyone will see any practical use for the knowledge we'll have risked our lives to gain.

"But BuScience cannot, in all conscience, claim that the universe is a closed book until the effort has at least been made, and it's glaringly obvious that there's where the real motive for this lame-duck venture lies. Not in curiosity, but in pride. In the effort itself.

"I often wonder whether Man has not so much completely indexed the universe as tossed some of it behind the filing cabinet. It's so easy to be a completist if you can set up your own standards of completion.

Affectionately,

JAMES."

He finished the letter and sat broodingly regarding it, his heavy, gray-speckled brows casting dark shadows into his eyesockets. Finally he sighed, crumpled the sheet of paper, and dropped it carefully into a waste chute, making sure it caught fire. He still wrote to his wife, and did not dismiss the possibility that she read his letters. But he never had to mail them. Harriet Dalkeith had died ten years before of mysterious causes that the doctors had refused to classify as a disease, since what Dalkeith had stubbornly insisted were symptoms had not been described in any of their texts.

He got up and left his cabin, walking up the companionway without special haste, and without a glance for the stars that hung in stippled splendor outside the viewscreens. Earthmen had long since found the stars too commonplace to be worthy of their attention. A man may spend a large part of his day's routine in caring for his back garden, but only if he shows it off to guests does it temporarily regain some measure of objective interest for him. And there were no guests to whom the Earthmen could show off their galaxy.

Of all the Earthmen aboard *Macedonian,* James Dalkeith was paradoxically most aware of and least affected by the fact that there was only one significant race alive in the Galaxy. By now, loneliness was such a natural part of his life that he found nothing unusual in it. He walked through his life in much the same fashion as he daily walked up the companionway, completely unconscious of close-pressed bulkheads or metallic sterility, completely uninterested in what the viewscreens might show . . .

No one had ever satisfactorily named the race whose planets, barren and lifeless, devoid even of unburied skeletons, had once spread their power and their glory clear across the Galactic rim. By the time the first Earth ship arrived in the area all of the splendor had dimmed. Only the cities remained, lost and lonely under the winds of a thousand worlds, warmed by a

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hundred suns that set and rose on empty horizons.

Over and over again, as the Terrestrial ships penetrated deeper into the buried past of a once flourishing empire, the pattern repeated itself. Each solar system bearing its time-ravaged planet, with its cities set down exactly where an intelligent race would have put them.

The buildings rose at strategic transportation centers, near mineral deposits, and deep in the shelters of calm harbors. Highways and something very much like railroads connected them, and there were long, flat areas which did not need the rusting hulls of aircraft or spaceships to distinguish them for what they were.

And dominating every vista, dropped down as a child's blocks might have been dropped, choking the highways, obstructing the airfields and jamming the cities' wide streets were the temporary dwellings. Knocked together, glued, stapled, their roofs held down by cables already warping apart like dew-soaked matchboxes, they littered the planets, one after the other, until no possible process of civilization could have continued.

They teetered on the lips of mountain precipices, and smothered the farms. They clung to the roofs of the permanent buildings, and floated on rafts in the harbors. Wherever there was so much as a square yard of flat ground, there stood a temporary dwelling. The railroad stations had become huge rabbit-warrens, and the tunnels under the rivers had been converted into beehives.

The pattern never varied.

Each solar system had been ravaged to pay the price of that staggering, sudden, inexplicable rise in population. No planet incapable of sustaining life had escaped the lesser penalty of being stripped for the materials out of which more dwellings could be built. And each system had its world on which mountains were leveled, gorges filled, and seas channeled, the ground itself battered mercilessly by all the equipments of intensive agriculture until it expired, bled to death by the insatiable demand for food, more food, and yet additional food to sustain, at any expense, the teeming, erupting billions that had clung to their bare existence in the heaped dwellings.

It was always the same, wherever the Solar Union ships ventured. They never found a world whose cities had not staggered under the burden of the shacks, nor a solar system that had not been ruinously compromised to feed and house those perished billions.

Gradually, as the Solar Union's population grew, and its citizens began the purely mechanical task of filling the worlds their ships had claimed, the temporary dwellings had been cleared out, and the ravaged planets reclaimed. And there was nothing, really, to arouse significant curiosity on the part of the Earth people who now lived in the

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alien cities which they had won by default.

The aliens had lived, burgeoned, and gone, leaving their cities and highways behind for the Earthmen to modify as they saw fit. It was almost as though the cities were a gift, wrapped in the tissue-paper of the shacks which could be crumpled up and thrown away.

Only a few people had calculated the processes of normal weathering on each abandoned world, and extrapolated from those calculations. Only a few Earthmen made anything of the fact that, apparently, the entire alien empire had been totally abandoned in a single mass migration. Only a few wondered where that sudden outburst of population had come from, not more than one or two generations before the aliens had melted away. And only this one ship had been sent to seek out the central world from which the empire had sprung.

For it was enough, for most, that the few alien races they had encountered were only shadowy remnants now, swirled aside by the curling waves of Earth's battalions. And all Earthmen knew that there was now no race in the universe which could stand before the savage drive of an Earthman's hunger, or halt the remorseless expansion of her multiplying billions.

That there might once have been such a race—a great, intelligent race whose cities had risen while the muddy bricks of Mesopotamia's ziggurats were still drying in the Babylonian sun—was unimportant, for that race was gone without a sign, without struggle, without protest.

But why, and how, and where?

* * *

"There," Captain Roebling said. His blunt forefinger stabbed at the damp photograph that had just been chuted up from the mapping section's laboratories. "That's their home world."

Maguire, the semi-amateur xenologist, who had volunteered for the trip out of sheer boredom, looked down at the photographed solar system with his eyebrows drawn into a blasé ridge.

"Insignificant little thing, isn't it?" Maguire remarked.

Hallowell, the astronomer who was getting too old for serious work, grumbled petulantly under his breath. "So is ours."

But Dalkeith noticed that, while Hallowell had seen fit to defend the playthings of his craft, he did not examine the photograph too closely either. After all, this type of system had been one of the first kind to be thoroughly classified, and he could not reasonably display deep interest in something he'd learned by formula in his first year of study.

"Could we see the closeups, please?" Dalkeith asked.

Roebling shrugged and shuffled the photographs. "This one was taken inside the orbit of the fifth

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planet. This other one's quite close. It's obvious, at this distance, that Four is exactly like every agricultural planet.

"Typical," Maguire agreed.

Hallowell nodded, and even Dalkeith could see nothing new in the endlessly stretching plains, the glittering shreds of hothouses, and the gridwork of canals that were all that was left of the seas. The planet was absolutely dead, stripped of green, with the loam of its topsoil rapidly turning to sand.

Dickens, an ecologist who had been discharged from all his positions for habitual drunkenness, peered casually over Maguire's shoulder. "Has anybody ever figured out, in dollars what it would have cost to transport all that food back to the population?"

Roebling looked at him acidly. "Maybe they didn't use money. And maybe they thought it was worth it."

"I believe it's been calculated at twelve dollars for an ear of corn," Dalkeith said. "That's an average, of course, taken over the spread of varying local conditions for each system. And, it's for corn, which they did not have. The figures were derived by Holman—who is, of course, our best ecologist. But, as Captain Roebling has pointed out, their economic system might not have operated on fixed values at all."

Dickens shot him a spiteful glance, which Dalkeith caught and held until the alcoholic dropped his eyes and retreated back to the fringe of the group. Roebling smiled thinly and picked up the next photograph.

"This is their home world. It's the second planet, as you know, and the photographs were taken from a rather low altitude. I don't see anything special about it."

Dalkeith saw the usual pattern of a modern urban distribution, an excellent transportation network, and what was probably a spacefield. It was somewhat difficult to pick out these details, for here, as everywhere else throughout the alien empire, the temporary shacks occluded everything else.

"Well, they certainly didn't stage a last stand here," Maguire commented.

"Wild goose chase," Hallowell grunted.

"Are you sure this *is* the home world?" Dickens asked Roebling, apparently trying to get back into the intellectual forefront.

"Well," Roebling told him patiently, "they didn't put up signs in English, but all their charts use this sun for a zero-point."

"I don't think," Dalkeith pointed out, "that there was any real expectation of our finding them still alive here. Correct me, Captain, but aren't we here simply to find out what happened to them?"

"Who cares?" Dickens asked.

"Somebody must," Maguire said, "or you wouldn't be drawing a salary. You *are* being paid, aren't you?"

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Roebling laughed harshly, and Hallowell grumbled in bitter tones. Dalkeith turned impatiently and walked back toward his cabin. Unless the photographic robot had made an unusually rapid return from its mission, in barely half an hour the *Macedonian* would land. He had no intention of spending those thirty precious minutes embroiled in a squabble, particularly since there were still a number of excellent books unread in his locker . . .

Dalkeith, Roebling, and Maguire made up the first landing party, taking one of the tenders while the mother ship went into orbit around the planet.

Finding a clear space to land would have been difficult, but Roebling did not even try. He simply shot the tender downwards, crushing a shack and setting its splinters afire. The flames spread rapidly, and in a few moments the entire area was burning, smoke and soot twisting into the sky.

The three Earthmen clambered out of the ship with their personal fields switched full on. Roebling and Maguire emerged first, cursing the smoke that made vision beyond the fields impossible. Dalkeith followed them with a crooked smile twisting a corner of his mouth. Earthmen had ever been restive at the inconvenience of wading through their own conflagrations.

He wondered philosophically whether any valuable clues had already been destroyed by Roebling's precipitous methods.

Finally, they reached a river bank. The fire had burned itself out, at least on this front, and they were able to see the city that towered on the island beyond. Dalkeith noted that the bridges were dotted with shacks, and that even the ledges of the buildings were festooned, as though a plague of galactic praying mantises had swept over the alien empire, leaving their spore sacks behind.

Somehow, the analogy seemed temporarily a bit too uncomfortable to pursue, and he floated across the river with the other two men, carefully looking for something unusual, but not *too* unusual.

There was neither one nor the other. The metropolis was apparently the model on which all the colonial cities had been built, and there were no significant differences between parent and offspring. There was the same basic gridwork of streets, overlaid by the clustering shacks which had choked them so badly that the surface transport vehicles—gyrostabilized atomic-electrics, mostly—had been piled up in windrows along the dead belt-walks. There was considerable evidence that even these had become kennel-like shelters. Narrow footpaths laced and twisted among the shacks, and Dalkeith could imagine what a labyrinthine hell the city must have been in its last days.

"Lemmings," Maguire said.

Roebling stopped kicking aside a

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crate that was in his way. "What about lemmings?"

Maguire shrugged. "The Terrestrial lemming inhabits the Arctic tundra. Periodically, the ranks of the lemmings are catastrophically swelled by a frenzied outburst of whelping. It becomes impossible for any of them to survive on what would be an equitable share of the available food. So, at the guidance of the same kind of idiotic impulse which first led them to breed such numbers, most of the lemming horde begins to move, heading blindly for the sea. Having reached it, they continue to move on until they have all drowned."

Roebling turned suspiciously to Dalkeith. "Is he right?"

Dalkeith shrugged in turn. "It's common knowledge." Probably, he should have been more diplomatic, but he could not generate enough concern within himself to care one way or the other. The whole expedition was staffed by second-raters, and he was one of them by virtue of his total lack of concern for personal survival.

Roebling looked at him sourly, but let it pass. He turned back to Maguire. "You think they all went off and cut their throats, somewhere?"

Maguire nodded carelessly. "More than likely."

Dalkeith snorted. "*Not very!* Mr. Maguire, would you mind telling us where the corpses are?"

Maguire looked painfully at Dalkeith. "Is that a serious question?"

"Yes, it is," Dalkeith answered. "I'll grant you that no aggressive race would adopt universal birth control—even discounting the evidence of the shacks. But if you're going to insist on pursuing your theory, then you've got to be able to point out the mass grave in which a hundred billion corpses rest. You've also got to explain how they all managed to kill themselves at precisely the same time all over their empire—and who buried them. And last of all, you've got to explain *why* they piled themselves in heaps on the planets they had, instead of simply going out and colonizing fresh ones."

Maguire looked at Roebling in an attempt to share his feeling of scornful disgust. But Roebling was temporarily overcome by Dalkeith's vehemence and was pursuing his usual policy of siding with the loudest voice. Consequently, Maguire was a trifle harassed as he answered Dalkeith.

"Inasmuch as they had spaceships—or had you forgotten?—I imagine they simply got in them and went somewhere else to die."

Dalkeith practically laughed in his face. "That remark is neither consistent with my last objection, nor very bright as a whole. If you'll look around you, Mr. Maguire—obviously you haven't taken the trouble to read the books which cover the subject—you'll realize that no such gigantic undertaking was possible to this civilization, suffocating as it was under the

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weight of its own numbers. No, Mr. Maguire. The aliens neither committed suicide nor went somewhere else to die. They simply vanished. Simply disappeared—into some place where even the Solar Union cannot find them."

Dalkeith suddenly realized that his hands were shaking, and that his face was red with rage. Shocked, he tried to discover why, and found, to his objective amusement, that he could still be angry at the citizens of an interstellar civilization who had so much knowledge available to them in their libraries that they did not bother to learn anything. It was an illogical anger, he realized, for it was only natural that most men could see no purpose in personal education when a flick of a switch on a facsimile receiver could put the proper reference work in their hands.

And it would probably be some centuries before they retrogressed sufficiently to forget what the seldom-used switch was for.

Roebling was grinning at Maguire, his choice of the proper allegiance having been confirmed. "He's got you there."

Disgruntled, Maguire turned on his heel and stalked off, disappearing behind a cluster of shacks. Dalkeith made sure the xenologist's recognition field was being broadcast, and, smiling faintly, watched him go. After all, the man couldn't get lost, and his ego badly needed to be bolstered by the smashing of a few abandoned alien artifacts. It was a harmless enough occupation, since any such artifacts were monotonously the same — and monotonously unrevealing — from world to alien world.

Roebling was looking at him. "Well, what do we do now?"

Dalkeith twitched a shoulder. "If you were an alien, Captain, where would you put your libraries?"

"Libraries? How should I know?"

"For a start," Dalkeith murmured under his breath, "you might try studying the typical alien city plan as published repeatedly in most current archeological texts."

"Huh? What'd you say?"

"Nothing, Captain. Just thinking aloud. Look—we can all get together whenever we have to. Suppose you start looking around for something interesting — anything that looks like it hasn't turned up in an alien city before. I'll work over toward the east. If either of us finds anything, or we need Maguire, we can call each other."

"All right—we'll do that," Roebling said, and began lackadaisically sauntering away, opening doors at random as he went. Dalkeith waited until he was out of sight, and then set out toward where the library ought to be. He did not bother to watch every possible hiding place for lurking aliens. The sense of oppression that weighted his thoughts did not stem from a fear of possible physical attack . . .

He found the library exactly

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where the city plans of the colonial cities had indicated it would be. It was a larger building than its models on the other alien worlds, but no different in basic external detail.

Dalkeith stopped and studied it for a moment. He had never entered one of the colonial libraries before and he wondered, momentarily, what he might find here, apart from stacks of books covered with unintelligible symbols. He wondered if, while Roebling instinctively burned and Maguire had to demolish, his own nature did not demand that he seek out books—even books he could not understand.

He snapped on his lights and went into the building.

As he walked slowly down the central corridor, he saw the unobstructed walls of an alien building for the first time. The libraries had always been the single exceptions to the rule that converted every available shelter into a warren. He saw murals devoted entirely to the incomprehensible, wild beauty of abstract symbols which were meaningless to an Earthman. There were sculptures as well—equally abstract and equally invalid in his Terrestrial terms—that haunted him with the baseless conviction that, if he only looked at them long enough, he might begin to understand.

There was a music room, clustered with dusty machines that he could not activate. He had never heard the aliens' music—had been warned not to, by those who had.

And there were the books—stack after stack of them, bound at the top, printed on the inorganic fiber which Earthmen had long ago analyzed and adapted to their own use. He stared at them helplessly.

He came, finally, to the strange room.

No other library had included this room in its plans. This was a special place—the residuum of manuscripts so valuable that only the home world's library could house them. Doubtless, there were transcripts in the other libraries, concealed in the anonymity of their incomprehensible stacks. But this was where the originals were.

And he sucked in his breath as he saw the conventionalized half-globe of Earth embossed on the lintel.

It was dusk when he rejoined Maguire and Roebling at the edge of the burned-over area. The fire was still sweeping an ever-widening wall of flame through the shacks, but it had passed over the horizon by now, and nobody cared as long as it did not turn toward the Earthmen.

"Find anything?" Maguire asked.

"I'm not sure," Dalkeith answered.

Roebling caught sight of the two books in his hand. "What's that?"

Dalkeith shrugged. "One's an alien book. The other's a copy of *The Gallery*. That's a Twentieth Century Terrestrial novel by a man named John Horne Burns."

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Maguire snorted. "Huh! A book you can't read and an antique that can't possibly be applied to modern living."

Roebling looked puzzled. "I didn't see you carrying any novel when we left the tender."

Dalkeith shrugged.

Maguire was fidgeting impatiently. "Well, let's go. We've done our job. I want to get back home."

Roebling looked around at the city. "A washout. A flat washout, just like all the other planets. Frankly, I don't see where it makes any difference whether they died or just evaporated. It's a cinch they don't have any significance any more."

The three of them walked back to the tender, returned to *Macedonian,* and shortly thereafter the ship broke orbit and began the journey back to Griffon.

Through most of the trip, Dalkeith kept to his cabin, hunched over his desk with the novel and its translation spread out before him. Slowly, yet incredibly rapidly with the Terrestrial text for comparison, he deciphered the alien language for which no rosetta stone had ever before been found.

Finally, he had it. He sighed once as the alien symbols resolved themselves into a systematic, comprehensible order, and an ironical and yet somehow coldly satisfied smile flickered over his face . . .

Dickens, as usual, was sitting woodenly in the lounge, a faint aroma of wine surrounding every word he spoke. Dalkeith leaned back in the chair he had drawn up opposite the ecologist, his hands calmly folded in his lap.

"Tell me, Dickens," he said, "you're an ecologist. Suppose one of those alien agricultural planets were at the peak of its productivity. How many people could it feed?"

Dickens mused for a few minutes, his lips moving slightly. Finally, he said; "Comfortably? About three billion. On the average, of course. The average is very important—"

"Of course," Dalkeith cut him off. "But I meant at a bare subsistence level. How many then? No matter if they're riddled with deficiency diseases, or if, say, the weaker ones die off. How many under those conditions?"

Dickens fell back into thought as a porpoise plummets into the cold sea. "Oh, I don't know—six, six-and-a-half billion, I suppose."

"In other words, the equivalent of, say, three complete generations, piled up on top of each other."

"Well, yes, but of course—" Dickens smiled superiorly, "Generations don't pile up on top of each other. People die, y'know."

"Quite right—they do," Dalkeith agreed, and left him.

Roebling, as usual, was staring fixedly at the dials of his instruments, ever-fearful that one of them might call on him to make an instant decision. He shot a look of annoyance at Dalkeith.

"Yes?"

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"Captain, I'd like to talk to you for a moment, if I could," Dalkeith said slowly, his eyes holding the barest glimmer of cold amusement. "I think I've found out something about the aliens."

Instantly, small beads of perspiration formed above Roebling's lip. He gestured nervously for his Second to take over the dials, and turned to face Dalkeith with his eyes twitching.

"What about them?" he asked jerkily.

Dalkeith let him wait a moment, savoring the reaction he knew would come.

"Suppose I told you that the aliens had time travel?"

Roebling stared at him incredulously, horrified vistas of imagination suddenly opening in his mind. Then he suppressed them categorically, and rallied to the defense of all that was possible, as distinct from the classified impossible.

"Impossible," he said assertively. "Can't be done."

"I've suspected it since that afternoon on the home world," Dalkeith said quietly. "Now I've deciphered their language, and I'm sure."

"Nonsense." Roebling was turning pale. "Look, Dalkeith, if this is the best you can do to take up my time, I'm warning you right now—"

"I can prove it," the xenolinguist said, still softly. He held out the two books he had brought back from the alien library, together with all of the notes he had made.

"Take a look. I didn't bring this novel with me. I found it in a case at the home world's library, with the alien edition beside it. I can read their language, now. And I managed to work out the copyright notice in their translation. If you'll look at the notes, you'll see that it reads more or less like this:

"Copyright, 1947, by John Horne Burns. Published by the firm of Harper and Brothers, New York City, Earth, Solar Union, 1947. Photocopied and placed in Mindek City Library, 2418. Translated and published in Minan, 2418."

"The dates, of course, are in the alien chronology, but I've worked it out."

"Now, look, Dalkeith," Roebling began belligerently, "this is 2388." Then he realized that Dalkeith had indeed proved his case, and he turned even whiter. "You made a mistake," he said weakly.

Dalkeith shook his head. "I checked it three times. And it's not a typographical error, either.

"No, there's no mistake," he continued, the cold smile growing at the corners of his mouth. "They left this there deliberately, for me to find. And they knew I was coming, for in the future from which these books come, my discovery must be a part of their history. They want us to know, Captain. And I suspect that must be because it's too late, now to stop them."

"You mean, they're going to

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come back out of the future and kill us all?" Perspiration was streaming down Roebling's quivering face. He held the alien books limply, as though he might drop them at any moment.

Dalkeith shook his head. "Not out of the future, Captain. Out of the past.

"They knew we were coming, and they knew they couldn't stop us with what they had. Even they—" he said with a trace of wonder, "even a race with their abilities, and their magnificent courage, were afraid of Earthmen. So they evaded us temporarily. All of them—every adult and child, Roebling—went back to their past. That's why we found the shacks. That's why they starved and piled themselves in heaps. Because, suddenly, the past had to feed almost three generations from their future.

"And that's why we could never find them. They're back there in the past, waiting until the Earthmen have completely taken over their territories. Possibly, they even foresaw that we'd make their worlds liveable again, and possibly they're giving us time to do that for them. And they *will* come back, Roebling. We found no corpses. They didn't starve and crush themselves to death, back in the past. They gambled that they could somehow stay alive under that terrible load, and they won.

"They've got us, Roebling. They've got us cold. They took every one of their time machines with them, of course, and we can't follow and attack them in the past. And now, very soon, I suspect, they'll begin taking back their empire. They'll appear in our homes and streets—*their* old homes and streets, Roebling—and simply swamp us. And whatever resistance we may be able to raise will not be enough to stop them. Just as they disappeared, all together and all tracelessly, so they'll reappear, all together, infiltrating instantaneously, with each generation going back to its proper place. And then they'll live on, and grow, and reach the future from which they planted those books for me to find.

"Don't you wonder, Captain, why they've bothered to warn us?"

Roebling shook his head in numbness, his eyes dull.

"I think it's because they saw no point in shocking us into paralysis, as well as conquering us. And there's something else. That copyright date mentions the Solar Union. It will still be extant in 2418. That means they'll let us keep our own empire. All they want is theirs back. They're a considerate people, Roebling. I think I'll enjoy meeting them."

Roebling shook his head again. "No. They'll kill us. They'll kill us all," he muttered. "I know they will."

Dalkeith smiled gently as he walked back down the companionway to his cabin. Kill them all? He

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doubted it strongly. It was hard to say whether the aliens had simply meant to warn the Earthmen, or whether they had also wanted him to draw all the possible inferences from the copyright notice. Or whether they had been following some complex, alien motivation which he had misinterpreted entirely.

But he did not think so. And he wondered whether that equality between races which the aliens implied had been their generous grant to the conquered Earthmen or whether it might not have come about in an entirely different fashion.

For there are several types of conquest, and various kinds of battles, and there was really no predicting whether the Earthmen might not now turn their backs on the index cards which had betrayed them.

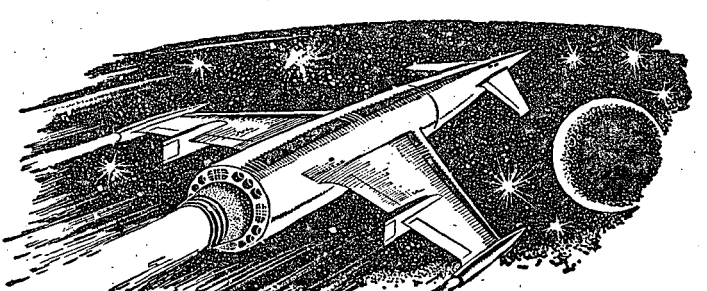
Dalkeith smiled again as he sat down to write his wife a letter. He wrote rapidly, though not hastily, for he had other writing to see to.

It was risky, drawing so many inferences from a single dubious source, but he did not think he had been wrong.

There were many Terrestrial books in that special, reserved room. A very great number, by Terrestrial thinkers, Terrestrial philosophers, Terrestrial scientists.

Those, and the two versions of the novel, and one other, all of the last three so placed that he could not possibly miss them. He had left that third book unread, as he had left the others, for he could not cheat on the future, but that third book, there among all the others the aliens prized, had served as confirmation of his present conclusions, for it had contained them. He had not read it, but he knew, for he was going to write its first chapter today.

And he wrote it while *Macedonian* fled back to Griffon among the stars that Earthmen would soon again regard with wonder.



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the happy music

by . . . Jeanne Williams

Don Ruben played by ear, and his tunes were joyful. But joy to a tortured man may be the waltzing motes of slow madness.

RAIZ MERCED was rich. He owned a sugar hacienda in Morelos, a henequen plantation in Yucatan, and many lesser holdings. And being rich, he was constitutionally unhappy.

Perhaps that was why the son irritated him almost beyond endurance as his limousine carried him past the *jacales* on one of his northern estates. He had a hangover, a knowledge that this rotundity was increasing daily, and the conviction that his Vera Cruzian dancer's eyes gleamed more for his money than for him. Also he was disgusted with his name. It meant Root of Mercy.

Root, indeed! Had his parents thought they were producing a tuber? He snorted in exact time with the first note of the music.

Outraged that anyone should dare to make music while he was gloomy, Merced growled at his driver to stop. From the lilt of the tune, he expected to see some trifling boy, but as he glared back toward the mud-and-thatch huts, he saw instead a scrawny old man.

A bone-bag huddle, crouched in the sun, his bony fingers loving the

The author of this star-bright little story, which blends human cruelty, violence and earthy humor with a perceptiveness truly remarkable started writing seriously two years ago while studying at Ohio University. She is twenty-four and has a five-year-old son and an Air Force husband. She has sold thirteen Western stories, but only one other fantasy. We're sure that Jeanne Williams will captivate all readers with the music of Don Ruben.

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strings of his *guitarra*. He played soft and he played low, but it was happy music, the dance of early sun. So frail he seemed, the breeze could lift him like a husk, with hair like frayed sisal straggling over his face. Yet he made the glad music.

The old fool! What did he have to make songs about?

Merced swelled with disgusted rage. "Bring the beggar here!" he fumed.

The chauffeur hustled over and carried the wretch to the limousine, handling him gently.

"Let him walk alone," Merced ordered. "You needn't be so tender!"

"Don Ruben has lost the use of his legs," the driver mumbled, lowering the musician to the ground. "A long journey he took—."

"What are his journeys to me?" Merced said. "Enough that he offends my ears!"

Merced turned angrily on the old man. *Don* Ruben—that was rich. A title of respect for this scarecrow.

"How is it," Marced asked, "that you play frivolous tunes when you should be practicing your funeral hymn?"

Like an aged salamander, Don Ruben faced the light. "There are enough dirges. My *guitarra* will play only joyful tunes."

He began fondling the instrument. A smile was on his face, as if he failed to realize that he was talking to a great *hacendado*.

"Quit that twanging!" Marced roared angrily. "Look around you, old man. Look at yourself, at that wreck of a body! How can you be happy?"

Don Ruben sighed. "But, senor, I can't look. I'm blind."

He said it with a mild courtesy that set Merced's teeth on edge. The monstrousness of it! What right had the creature, blind, ancient, and poor, to strum gay tunes while he, Raiz Merced, remained miserable? It was not to be borne.

"If you're blind, why don't you stay in your hovel?"

Don Ruben struck a note. It trembled high and clear. "I listen for the sunlight, senor. I listen and it tells me things, it tells me happy songs." He sounded another note.

Quivering with repugnance, Merced glared at the sightless man. He told himself Don Ruben was only a senile crackpot but as he tried to order the chauffeur to drive on, the music thrummed in his head, a taunting, mocking play of sunbeams. It had to be stopped.

"Old man," rasped Merced, "play a song of blindness and dirt, of no bread in the belly, and no fire in the winter. Play me a song of hate!"

"But, senor, I can't." The wrinkles in Don Ruben's face bunched like the scum on stirred honey. "My *guitarra*—"

"To kindling wood with your *guitarra!*" Merced bellowed. With an effort, he calmed himself and made his voice coaxing. "You understand, Don Ruben, that I'm a

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weary man. The piggish evil of the world is all around me. If it were put into music, I might be free of it. Make me such a song—a song of lust and murder and self-sickness. Make it and I will reward you handsomely. You shall have a house, and a servant to tend your old bones. All for a song!"

Don Ruben's hands lay still. He seemed to be listening to something. To greed, perhaps? Merced ran his tongue over his lips and grinned. No matter how piously they mumbled, money snared them all in the end.

"No." Don Ruben shook his head. "I can't play like that. I am sorry for your discontent. Perhaps a dance song—"

Sorry? That peasant to be sorry for Raiz Merced? That could not be endured. Merced clutched his driver's arm.

"Take me to the estate manager's place."

Through the roar of the engine, the screech of tires, came Don Ruben's playing. *Not for long, not for long.*

Ten minutes later, Merced watched with his manager as Don Ruben was bundled onto a mule and jostled off from the *jacales*. He still clutched his guitar. Merced shrugged contemptuously.

The lunatic would soon care more for shelter and food than his sun songs. Listening to the light, indeed! What foolishness!

"If he does find his way back," Merced warned the manager, "don't feed him unless he first makes the kind of song I want. I'm giving him plenty of inspiration," he added with a chuckle.

"He's a funny one," said the manager. "He used to be a *mariachi,* a traveling minstrel. He was always hunting for a perfect note. He went blind and came back here. He says that sometimes while he's playing, he hears that perfect note."

"Don't be sticky," advised Marced. "Let's see him stay alive on those songs of his!"

Merced went south again. He spent a few weeks in Mexico City, and a month with his dancer at Guadalajara. Surely Don Ruben must have long since crept back, whining a song that would harmonize with a chorus of fiends.

Only Merced couldn't be sure. The gay lilt of the *guitarra* echoed in his head. He grew more angry and morose daily, until, in spite of his wealth, his dancer ran off with a *torero,* a mere novice—not even a real matador.

It was the last straw. Merced drove back to the northern estate. His manager, who knew where his tortillas came from, met him with bows and flowery respect.

But no word of Don Ruben.

"Well?" Merced cut in at last. "What goes with our joyous *mariachi?* Back in his hut, eh?"

Paling, the manager rubbed his hands nervously. "Ah, no. He's not here."

"You're hiding something. Where is he?"

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"It's not my fault," whimpered the manager. "I swear it isn't. I've even burned down his hut. He sleeps out in the brush. But a few women sneak him food and—"

Merced grabbed the babbling man's arm. "The music, idiot! What sort does he play?"

"He plays—he—"The manager's face dripped sweat. "His playing hasn't changed."

Blackness shot with red. Whirring, dinning rays of light that gave off sound. Merced slapped the manager across the face.

"You've let him make a joke of me!" he cried. "Have him jailed!"

The tune would change. Oh yes, it was going to change, no matter what happened.

* * *

Don Ruben had the draggled look of a mangy pelican. He hunched in the corner of the cell. His bones showed through the faded skin.

Merced planted himself in the doorway. "Well, Don Ruben, play me a song."

"With gladness," the old voice quavered. Don Ruben set his fingers to the strings.

Music came, curling its gay torment into Merced's brain. A happy song. More subtle than it used to be, but damnably, horribly joyful.

On and on it went—mocking, taunting.

Merced sprang across the room, and seized one thin old wrist. It was not at all hard to break. The bone snapped like a dried stalk.

The music wavered as Don Ruben bent with pain. But then, with his other hand, he kept playing. Happy, he was. The fool was still happy! Merced grabbed the other wrist.

It, too, broke easily.

"Now what?" Sweat poured from Merced. But he laughed, he roared. For now there could be no music. The guitar lay in the old man's lap like the useless wood it was.

Sanity came back to Merced. He said almost kindly, "You shouldn't have been stubborn. I have my way, you see."

Then the music came. Sweet and low and tremulous, but trembling with hope, not fear. Don Ruben's hands lay ruined but the strings of the guitar moved.

"The note," Don Ruben whispered. "The happy music—!"

Sun rays burst in Merced's brain. The bitch *guitarra* that would be singing! He caught the thing up, smashing, slamming it down on Don Ruben. He beat with it until the old man lay dead, and the guitar was splintered and broken. Merced spat.

"Play now! Play without hands, play without life! Play with your soul, you old he-goat!"

Crashing of light, the glare of sound. Gay music, louder and louder, played by something Merced couldn't touch. In his last moment of sanity, listening to the notes crashing in his brain, Merced realized he hadn't the ear for them.

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the scientific approach

by . . . Russ Winterbotham

A very uncouth fellow was the Earthman. He was horribly ill too, infected with the deadliest of diseases—the virus of love.

In Gardel's catalogue of inhabited planets of Sub-Galaxy 308, he describes Earthmen as being "never without motives." He says: "Even if he plans to kill you, an Earthman will be able to give you a high-sounding, idealistic reason for taking away your life."

So far in the history of our planet, Lura 66, only one Earthman ever actually landed, and made himself at home. A tall, broad-shouldered, dark-haired man he was —with unusual vitality and muscle. Truly a disgusting, primitive sort. One of his first acts was to whistle at some of our females who were working at the spaceport.

I happen to know a great deal about this Earthman, for I was his constant companion and I taught him our language. In some ways, Gardel was quite correct. Otto, as he was called, frequently justified his actions with sentimental motives, but I think he believed in them himself. That is, if he believed in anything. Sometimes I thought he took everything on our planet as a huge joke.

"Your race has the makings of greatness," I told him, "but it will

With this brilliant little fantasy, abounding in cosmic satire and whimsey unlimited we welcome to our pages for the first time no less a celebrity than the Russ Winterbotham who carved star-bright predictions on argosies Marsward bound in the earliest pioneering days of interplanetary fiction.

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take many millions of years to reach its objective."

"It's curious," he said. "I was just thinking that you have the shape of a man—if only you filled it out."

"We have been men," I said, "but that is past history. Now we're something more."

"You still have the shape of a man. But you're so shriveled up!"

I laughed gently, so as not to offend him. "I'd hardly call our shapes the same. Your bulging muscles don't in the least resemble mine."

"Neither does your bulging head resemble mine," he replied.

I obtained quarters for him at government expense at a roctel, near the spaceport. I paid almost daily visits to his little cottage during his first quarter-year on our planet. I was early aware of his desire to make Lura 66 his home.

"The men aren't so special, but you can't say that about your women," he told me. "Every one is a glamor girl, first class."

"You're being very primitive," I told him.

"Okay, chum," said he. "I'm primitive and I like it."

I told him that my name was Ez, and that I was General Chairman of the Scientific Council, which investigated everything of scientific importance on the planet. Since he was a visitor from a far away planet, I considered him eminently worthy of a first class investigation.

My study of his character revealed a crudely well-adjusted individual. From the moment he landed he seemed at ease amidst surroundings which some visitors might have considered strange and even frightening.

"It's not so strange," he said, when I voiced my thoughts. "You're people, although you don't admit it. I like people. Besides, somebody has to introduce me to a few of these dames."

"Dames, always dames," I said. "You're disgusting."

He shrugged and I continued: "That sort of thing has been forgotten here." I used the tone of an indulgent parent chiding an infant for some trivial misdeed.

"Love is what makes my world go 'round," he said.

"If by 'love' you mean mating, we look upon it in a mature fashion—as a duty."

"Yeah, I guess it is. But I *like* to do my duty."

"It causes wars, crime and hatred," I went on.

"I suppose you've gotten rid of those things?"

"Well, not exactly. Some crime exists. We have wars and some people hate each other. But at least we're not bothered with love."

Otto squinted his eyes and wrinkled his brow. "Maybe Freud was wrong. And maybe he wasn't."

"Freud?"

"An Earth philosopher who thought he'd discovered the reason for everything," explained Otto. "Maybe he went too far. But I'm

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sure he went in the right direction."

I didn't propose to waste time discussing some primitive philosophy with an aborigine of a far-off planet, but try as I might to change the subject, Otto always came back to love. It seemed that every time one of our women passed by the window he would start talking about love again.

In the end, I humored him by discussing the subject. It was true, of course, that our records of love have lain for millions of years in the vaults of the National Library and that I had never attempted to study this archaic impulse. But I knew that love was practiced on some planets, and I had made a cursory examination of the phenomenon.

Love, it seems, is an illness—possibly spread by a virus. The woman is always the carrier, but a man is quite easily infected. There are various kinds of immunity, but no normal primitive is immune to all of the carriers of the disease.

Otto seemed particularly vulnerable and he had several attacks during our first interviews, although I couldn't diagnose the illness properly. He sometimes flushed, although when I took his temperature it appeared normal. He was afflicted with nervousness, and often his respiration came in the form of a long, drawn-out whistle.

"How can you sit there with all these beautiful dames going past and not even notice 'em?" he asked me one day.

I explained to him that scientific measures had been taken early in the history of our civilization to put love, as he called it, on a sensible basis. Men and women were chosen by lot, and mated rationally. There was none of the foolishness about it that was associated with the virus infection on his planet. Men regarded it only as a duty, and women considered it as a great honor.

"It seems to me that Lura 66 has all of the evils and none of the blessings we have back home," said Otto.

"I don't call being infected with love a blessing," I said.

"You poor kid," said Otto. "You'd be a lot happier if you weren't so repressed."

It is true that people on my planet are unhappy. It has been a chief problem of our scientists for generations. Many attempts have been made to alleviate our unhappiness, but the people remain unchanged, basically sad and basically dull. But often we can find solutions to modern problems in the study of primitive social structures.

The more I questioned Otto, the more I was half-inclined to believe that perhaps our approach to Scientific Mating was wrong. There are many cases on our planet of two different forms of life cooperating to promote the welfare of each other. Perhaps a virus could make man happier. It might be that this infection called love could become a blessing by making an unpleasant duty seem attractive.

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As a result of this line of thought, I broached the subject at a meeting of the board of the Scientific Council the following month.

"I'm quite sure our people prefer the old-fashioned method," said Dr. Pue, head of the Sociological Section.

"I'm not so sure that a controlled experiment of two groups might not be warranted," I replied.

In the end, a majority of the board supported my contention, but we were held back by not understanding the workings of the virus. Finally, Dr. Syto, the head of the Biological Section, offered to develop a virus that would infect people with love.

The meeting broke up with a great deal of enthusiasm for what we took to be a new turn in scientific discovery.

Even Dr. Pue, who had been one of the opponents of the move, became favorably disposed toward it in the end. "At least," he said, "it will enliven our annual report. Those things have been terribly dull lately."

However, as we left the conference room, we were immediately aware of a great commotion outside the Palace of Science, where our meetings were held. The door swung open and Otto came dashing into the room.

His clothing was torn, his hair disheveled and there were still bleeding scratches on his face and arms.

"I barely escaped with my life!" he exclaimed. "Save me!"

"Save you from what?" I asked.

"Those dames! They're ready to tear me to pieces."

In an instant I sensed what had happened. Otto had carried some of the love virus with him from the Earth. He had infected some of our women.

I signaled to Dr. Pue to take Otto to a place of safety and I stepped out of the Palace. At the gates was a throng of several hundred women. Only the stout metal bars prevented them from storming the Palace. Nothing like this had happened in thousands of years. Even our wars had been fought on a more formal basis.

I approached the gates, and the screaming women fell silent for a moment.

"We want him," one of them cried, finally.

"Control yourself," I said. I realized that I was dealing with sick women but I hoped I could reason with them. "Have you no dignity?"

"Dignity be damned," said another woman, "he's the first handsome man we've ever seen."

Dr. Syto came out of the Palace and tapped my shoulder. "Let me talk to them," he said. "You go back and see Otto."

Otto was in a chair in one of the laboratories, and Dr. Cim, head of the Medical Section was daubing antiseptic on his wounds.

Otto grinned. "A wild bunch, eh?"

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"You've infected them," I said. "They're all sick."

"Sick? They acted just about as sick as an old maid with a burglar under the bed."

"You've infected them with the love virus which you carried with you from Earth."

Otto's eyes gleamed. "So that's it. Love virus, hey? Well, I'll be damned."

"You've got to be isolated. Otherwise every woman on the planet will fall ill."

"That would be horrible for all you men, wouldn't it?" asked Otto.

"Too horrible for words."

Otto nodded slowly and soberly. The corners of his mouth twitched as if he were trying to control his emotion. "I guess, since I'm the cause of this, I ought to do something about it. Yes, you'd better isolate me."

Murmurs of approval went up among the scientists. Dr. Cim was passing out vials of internal antiseptic among us to safeguard us from infection.

"The place must be decided upon," I said. "Unfortunately, we have had no cases of love sickness on Lura for many years, and we don't know just what sort of a quarantine will be effective."

"It's a good thing I know," said Otto. "On the Earth, a desert island is pretty safe. I suppose you've got an island in the middle of the ocean, somewhere in the tropics with lots of palm trees and stuff?"

We studied maps and found just such an island, the Isle of Loneliness.

"I hate to be useless," said Otto. "If I were stuck out there and if you had to spend money paying troops to guard me, I ought to be doing something useful, shouldn't I?"

"That's kind of you. But I'm afraid that anything you produced might carry the virus," I told him.

"Yes, I guess I better not do any kind of labor," said Otto. "But I might perform a service. Supposing you made me the superintendent of a prison farm."

"But you'd infect all the prisoners," I protested.

"No," said Otto, "I'd take only those girls that caused the riot. You wouldn't want to let them off scot free after all that demonstration, would you? They'd already be infected and I could sort of punish 'em for their misbehavior."

I glanced at the scientists and they all nodded solemnly.

"Agreed," I said. "And you, Otto of the Earth, will be remembered as a man who did his duty."

"And how," said Otto.

Yes, I think Gardel was quite wrong in attributing sinister motives to the high-sounding words of Earthmen. Today Otto lives in self-imposed exile with a few score criminal women on the Isle of Loneliness. No one visits or leaves the island and even the waters around it are sterilized with millions of gallons of antiseptic. But for Otto's selfless devotion to duty, Lura might be infected with love.

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God and the apes

by . . . Horatio Winslow

For the pack to live one man had to be sacrificed—a man named Peter. So on Peter a light shone . . .

ENCLOSED YOU WILL find everything else I have been able to collect relative to the case: (1) Testimony of witnesses at Peter's execution; (2) Four letters from L. P. Harkless who helped Peter when he first came to Salem, Mass.; (3) Copy of the news "story" published in the Boston Courier for May 21st, 1923. Peter had already slipped past the immigration authorities, so the waterfront reporter had only what one of Peter's shipmates told him about the boy's earlier life; (4) Statement of sailor who was aboard the *Glasgow Lass* when Peter was rescued; (5) Full account of my conversation with Miles Eckstrom. This self-taught and rather remarkable man is now a highly successful contractor in Illinois. I can send you his address, if you wish. As you will observe, he talked with me very frankly. He believes, as I do, that Ida was killed by an extra-marital admirer. But he knows he could not have established an alibi and admits the possibility that he himself was guilty of the killing; (6) Statement of janitor of the Community Church who watched Peter make

We're startlingly convinced that no more unusual story than this ever came to the desk of a science-fantasy editor. It is a science-fiction story in a strict sense, but it is also a thrilling adventure story, and a crime shocker. And it is told with all the chilling suspense, vibrant, believable characterization, and human warmth that one would expect from the famed and gifted Horatio Winslow, author of countless short stories.

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steeple repairs after job was refused by professional steeplejack; (7) Communication from Lloyd's of London, stating that the Dutch tramp steamer *Anneke Jans* was lost in the autumn of 1914, presumably near the spot where, ten years later, the *Glasgow Lass* picked up Peter. Captain Vlag of the *Anneke Jans* was accompanied by his wife and his two-year-old son. This pretty well corresponds to what Peter's age must have been at that time.

In these seven exhibits there is nothing conclusive, but they tend to corroborate Peter's story.

In answer to your question, I am not a criminal lawyer. My practice has been almost entirely confined to civil cases. I undertook Peter's defense only at the express request of Judge Hawtrey.

Until assigned to his defense, I'd never met Peter. Twice I'd heard of him. When the steeple of the Community Church had been sabotaged by a bad wind, Peter, in spite of well-founded protests, had climbed the rickety structure and handled all outside repairs. And I remember someone telling me that he'd seen Peter rescuing a cat who'd clawed its way to the top of a tree and was afraid to come down. He said it was "better than a circus."

When I took the case, I thought Peter guilty but probably insane. I did my best to defend him. He refused to cooperate. Twice he asserted in open court, "Sure I kill her. I kill her because she run away from me."

The jury took some time to decide but they came back with murder in the first degree: death sentence mandatory. The case was, of course, appealed and the verdict confirmed. The governor refused to intervene.

The night before the execution I obtained permission from the warden to see Peter. We talked together in his cell, while outside the guards played pinochle.

When I told Peter of the governor's decision, he laughed and said, "Sure. Fine. Okay by me." He had an infectious, light-hearted laugh.

Slight, dark, active, he was probably about twenty-five but he seemed younger. His eyes had the same look you see on an outdoor person: a calm survey of the middle-distance and beyond.

"Peter," I said, "I want you to tell me something about yourself. So far, you've never answered my questions frankly."

"You sure they hang me?"

"It looks bad, Peter."

He laughed again and walked up and down the cell. When he moved he was incredibly lightfooted and he stepped—if one might so express it—deftly and delicately. "If they hang me—all right: I answer questions. What you want to know?"

"Let's begin at the beginning. Where did you come from, Peter? I mean, in the first place. This time tell me the truth."

During the trial he claimed he'd

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been born the son of a German family in Salem and had spent most of his boyhood working on Portuguese fishing boats. Thus he accounted for his misuse of the English language.

"You want to know?"

"Of course I want to know."

"When I tell you," he smiled as though it were the greatest joke in the world, "then you say to yourself, 'Oh, that damn' liar, Peter!"

"I'm ready to believe you, if you'll speak the truth."

"All right. You see if you believe me." He sat down on the edge of the bunk, facing me and smiling like a mischievous boy. "*Glasgow Lass*—she take me off West Coast Africa."

"The West Coast of Africa? And where were you before that?"

"I do' know. I'm too small."

"What do you mean, Peter?"

"Look. There was shipwreck, I guess, first, but all I remember is big bang, and I am much afraid. I cry."

"Well, what happened?"

"I don't remember. They told me."

"Who told you?"

He half-closed his eyes and looked at me with another of his friendly, half-teasing smiles. "Now sure you gonna say, 'Peter is one damn' liar.' "

"Why wouldn't I believe you?"

"Because in court you tell everybody you think I'm crazy. Nobody ever believe me. Sailors on the *Glasgow Lass* don't believe me. Only one—very good man with big Bible. He say it was work of God. He give me my name I got—Peter Smith."

I felt I was on the trail of something. My questions I tried to make not like those of a prober after facts, but like those of a parent who listens to a child's exaggerations, hoping to get a grain of truth with all the chaff.

"I'll believe you, Peter," I said. "Who was it told you?"

He studied me for perhaps a minute. Then he laughed and said, "If you believe me—if you don't believe me—no difference now. It was those apes—those apes tell me what happen."

"Apes?"

"Big—you know—big monkeys."

"How did they tell you, Peter? In what language?"

I thought, *Here's my first break. Crazy. Now I've got something to justify an emergency appeal to the governor.*

"They talk ape language. Not so many words but lots of talk."

Anyhow this was a start. "Peter, what did these apes tell you?"

"They tell me plenty but pretty hard to understand. Like they got no ape word for 'gun'. I don't know what they mean till one day I hear a gun shoot and I see it shoot. Then I know. Well, these apes say first they see me with man. Man fires gun and he kill baby ape."

"Then what?"

"Then those apes kill him. They

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gonna kill me too; only one of those apes she is mother of little dead baby. She throws down that baby and she grab me and don't let no apes kill me."

"You remember that?"

"I don't remember nothing. Maybe I get knocked on the head. First thing I remember, I am up in tree and that female ape she is my mother. But I don't understand ape language yet."

It began like that. Of course, I took it for granted that he was lying, though it seemed a mighty circumstantial lie. I'm pretty efficient with witnesses who are evading the truth; as I talked I set little traps for Peter. He never fell into them. His dream world, if it was a dream world, had all three dimensions. Every fact he brought out fitted in perfectly, buttoned up with something else. It was more real, as he told it, than Kipling's Mowgli stories.

But you mustn't assume I sat there with open mouth, swallowing impossibilities. I didn't believe it at all when he started. And at three the next morning, when I woke the governor, it wasn't because I believed what Peter had told me—the spell had worn off—but because I wanted Peter to have a chance to talk again to a psychiatrist. The governor, however, refused.

According to his story, Peter had fallen in with this tribe or pack of giant apes when he was under six; he must have lived with them for about eight years. Their manner of life was his. In a short time he could communicate with them and his climbing was almost on a level with theirs. He joined them in all their doings, when they were mocking at the crocodiles or raiding the fields of the natives.

On one occasion there was a pitched battle between the raiders and natives, defending their crops with ancient guns. The Old Man of the Apes, chief of the band, was wounded. To create a diversion while others saved the leader, one of the younger and stronger apes rushed furiously at the humans, clawing and biting. While the natives were killing the youngster, the Old Man was carried to safety.

"That is the law of the apes," Peter said.

"What is?"

"All for the pack. Everything for the pack. If some ape do bad things for hurt pack, then that ape he get killed. And when wise old ape is in danger, then is time for young ape to die for him. Wise old ape is more important for pack than young ape."

By this time Peter had worked out of his earlier mocking attitude. He was talking to me as one man talks to another of the beliefs most vital to him. On my side I forgot altogether I was trying to prove the man a mental case; I forgot the business which had brought me there; I talked to him as you would talk to some traveller who has seen a passionately absorbing phase of

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life which you have never seen and never will see.

More than two hours must have passed while I listened to the details of the life of the tribe; their primitive language, if it can be called that; their courtships; their matings; their relations with the rest of the animal world; and something which I can only call their religion.

This was a sort of sun worship. The sun, however, was not a mere celestial body: it was the right eye of an enormous Super-Ape. He watched over the tribe; approved of what was good for the tribe and condemned what was bad for the tribe.

And all that Peter told me was recounted so simply and so earnestly that, figuratively, I had to pinch myself to keep from believing it.

Peter was probably not more than twelve when the *Glasgow Lass,* laying to after a gale, heaved anchor off shore. The small boat landed; Peter saw his kind, came to them, and they carried him away—eventually to America. By the time he reached Boston he could talk a jumbled sort of English; he slipped past the immigration officials; was sheltered by a Mr. Harkless of Salem, to whom he told his story; ran away and spent the next few years with some Portuguese sword-fishers. Eventually, he came inland once more and settled in our little city.

By this time he had picked up the rudiments of two or three trades. As a rough carpenter he was given work by an ambitious and capable young contractor, Miles Eckstrom.

It seems beyond dispute that Peter married the woman, Ida, merely because he felt sorry for her; and there is not the slightest doubt that the child, born shortly after their marriage, was not his. Fortunately it died at birth. Six months later, Ida left Peter and a couple of years afterwards moved into the home of Miles Eckstrom. She was a handsome woman with a certain charm. Within a year she had spent Eckstrom's savings, disrupted his business life and, by playing on his jealousy, had set him to drinking heavily.

"Then what, Peter?"

"I got a fine feeling for Mr. Eckstrom because he is good man and he is smart man. But I think and I think and I dunno what to do. Then I remember something—money."

"Money?"

"Sure. In bank I got five hundred dollars. I think I go over there and tell her if she just let Eckstrom alone and go some other city. I give her five hundred dollars."

I waited.

"It gets maybe eight o'clock. I know Eckstrom is drunk somewhere, like every night, so now is time talk to Ida. I go to house and knock. Nobody answers. Then right off I know something is wrong. You see, I live so long with apes I

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am like them: when something is wrong, I know. So I don't stop by the door; I walk in."

"What did you see?"

"First, I don't see nothing but I smell blood. So I turn on the light. Ida, she lie on the sofa where she got killed by knife."

"What did you do then?"

"Oh, first I am glad—so very glad. Then from next room I hear somebody snoring and there is Eckstrom, drunk. I don't know if he kill Ida or not; but I know he can't prove he ain't done it. And while I try to think what to do, something happened."

"What happened, Peter?"

"I stand in that room and I try to think and I look here and I look there and sudden there comes a light. It is such a big light it makes that little electric lamp small like a candle. But there is more. The room is little, yet in that room stands a big ape, fifty times more big than any ape you ever saw. I fall down on the floor because I know who He is."

"Who, Peter?"

"He is the god of all the apes." Peter stood up. "He is the god of all things. He makes the sun move and He is the sun. He makes the moon move and the stars and He is these too. He makes the trees and the green plants grow and the seasons change. Everything that lives He makes and is."

Peter's head was thrown back and he looked up at the ceiling of the cell with his face shining.

"Then what did he do, Peter?"

"He don't do nothing but this. When I peek up at Him He don't speak one word, but first He point at Ida and then He point at me. Then He is gone."

"Well, what was the idea?"

Peter stared at me for a moment. "You don't see?"

"I'm sorry, but I don't."

"Look, mister. For the pack to live you got to sacrifice what ain't so good for what is plenty good. You got to sacrifice Peter, who is nothing, for Mr. Eckstrom, who is one fine man. I wake up Eckstrom. He is still drunk but I get him out of the house into the next street. Then I come back and I leave my finger prints on the knife—all over. Then I open the window and I yell to some peoples next door, 'Come quick! I kill this bad woman who run away from me.'"

After that I couldn't get any more out of him.

Of course, it was simple enough to explain Peter's vision of the Ape God. Man has always assumed that he is made in God's image and that therefore God, though much larger, must resemble man. Thus apes, capable of imagining a deity, would certainly picture Him in their own likeness. Peter, brought up among them, would have assimilated this belief, which would account for his subjective vision of the enormous Ape God.

All very elementary if Peter was telling the truth about his life with the apes.

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Still, as I thought it over on my way to the governor, I concluded that the whole adventure was impossible and absurd. It couldn't have happened. . . .

Peter was hanged the next morning. When the trap was sprung, the warden yelled, "Where's that light coming from?"

We all craned our necks. It didn't seem to be coming from anywhere in particular; but it was there all right and it was shining on Peter.

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jettison or die

by . . . F. B. Bryning

Emergency computations seldom achieve absolute precision. And thereby hangs an exciting tale.

IN MOON ROCKET SEVEN, halfway to the moon from Satellite Space Station Commonwealth Two, Astrogator John Greenwood handed a chart on a plastic clipboard to Captain Arthur Jones.

"It's impossible, I know. I've taken a 'fix' three times. Each time I've worked it out independently. I've checked every calculation twice. They all say the same. We're behind schedule!"

Jones frowned over the chart. The gap between their actual position and the computed position for this moment was considerable.

"If you're right, Jack—and I'll bet you are—we'll miss our rendezvous with the moon by about twelve hours."

"I want Aristarchus to take a radar check on us and confirm," said Greenwood. "We're on course, all right—but we're way behind time, with nothing to account for it."

"Duration of blast was correct," testified Jones, "I remember logging Brennschluss." He ran the log tape back to cut-off. "Here it is. We cut to two gravities after one hun-

What do the men of the space patrols think about as they chart their hazardous undertakings in the shadow of the Lunar Apennines or on the rust-red plains of Mars? What margins for error do they allow for air, fuel, food and water in calculations of hair-trigger accuracy on which their very lives must, of necessity, depend? You'll be in a far better position to judge when you've read this breathless F. B. Bryning yarn.

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dred-sixty-three seconds, as scheduled. Then cut-off at one hundred-sixty-five seconds. All gauges logged exactly the computed masses of fuels used during blast, the computed exhaust velocity, the acceleration—no, here's acceleration down a little below the anticipated five gs. It reads four point ninety-two gs., to be exact. Everything else checks. So that leaves only two possibilities."

"Faulty computation or excess mass," said Greenwood. "Failure to reach computed acceleration could mean we're over mass."

From a drawer Jones drew out the manifest for the voyage. "What's computed mass for cargo?"

"Twelve tons, three hundredweight, fifteen pounds, eleven ounces."

"Manifest agrees to the ounce. Seems we'll have to make a physical check of the cargo, item by item. Will you start while I contact Aristarchus?"

Rocket Base in moon crater Aristarchus was frankly incredulous, but agreed at once to check MR7's actual position and the computations for the voyage.

"More important, though if you *are* behind schedule, will be to compute an amended course and firing data. If you miss us we won't be this way again for a month!"

"I know it," replied Jones. "And we won't be there then. We suspect we are over mass. Greenwood's checking cargo now, and in— Hold on!" he interrupted himself as a low-toned buzz sounded from the intercom. "He's reporting something now."

"Stowaways!" came Greenwood's voice. "We've got two men aboard and some heavy equipment which must weigh a few hundred pounds on Earth!"

"Armed?" snapped Jones.

"No. I've searched them. They're both very groggy. Must have been slammed about during acceleration."

"Stowaways!" echoes Aristarchus when Jones relayed the startling news. "Surely not — these days! There are no predatory minerals cartels left now, to smuggle claim-peggers out here. What can their racket be?"

"I'll find that out," promised Jones grimly.

"The scoundrels!" came the voice of Aristarchus' forthright Commander Forman over the shoulder of his radio man. "Jettisoning's too good for them. Be sure you get their mass-equipment before you do throw them out!"

"I'll get it," said Jones.

Captain Jones' cheeks were ashen as he freed himself from his safety belt. Now he had before him the hardest duty a decent space man could face. He must perform the task of executioner.

For ten years no commander of a space vessel had had to jettison a stowaway. Jones was revolted at the sheer ill-fortune that had made it now his duty. For he was under the obligation and bound by regulation

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and precedent to, "Jettison any unauthorized personnel or commodity whose consumption of fuel, air, water, or sustenance of any kind, had jeopardised, or would or could jeopardize the safety of authorized personnel, the space-going vehicle itself, or the mission upon which it is engaged."

This hard rule was neither an arbitrary denial of clemency nor some malevolent device for claiming vengeance in advance. It was a matter of sheer survival. And so it would remain while "space-going vehicles" relied on rocket fuels which had to be consumed at mass ratios of anything up to sixty and more to one. When every voyage has to be calculated to the last ounce of payload, to the last ounce of food and water and air, and every extra ounce means an extra sixty or more ounces of fuel, the unauthorized additional mass of, say, one man of 150 pounds Earth weight can cause disaster. It could mean, for example, a shortage of 9000 pounds of fuel at a critical moment.

It follows that margins for reserve air, fuel, food, water, and margins for error in maneuvering must be kept as narrow as possible. If nothing should go wrong they are so much dead weight. If something should go wrong they provide only the bare minimum chance to survive. They include no provision for stowaways. So sheer necessity, without malice, decrees that a stowaway's life is forfeit and his mass must be jettisoned.

Furious at the irresponsibility of two grown men who, evidently, were pursuing some purpose at the risk of their own lives and in disregard of the lives of Greenwood and himself, and of those on the moon for whom the cargo of MR 7 might well be vital, Captain Jones went hand-over-hand down through his ship to the cargo hold. And as he went he realized that his anger was mostly at their placing upon him his terrible task. No one, he told himself savagely, had the right to make him an executioner.

Ten minutes later, although he knew his own chances of survival to be worse than before, he spoke like a man reprieved as he reported to Aristarchus.

"Strictly, they can't be regarded as stowaways," he explained. "It appears that we unwittingly shanghaied them. They are Doctor Fowler, geologist, and Dr. Hird, mineralogist, whom you are expecting, I believe, by passenger rocket tomorrow. By someone's mistake they came aboard us to stow their gear instead of aboard MR3. We took off, not knowing they were aboard. We used cargo rocket acceleration and they were slammed down amongst the cargo and knocked unconscious."

"Injured badly?" asked Aristarchus.

"Dr. Fowler has a broken arm and leg. Dr. Hird has abrasions and bruises. Both are space-sick and

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groggy. There can be no question of jettisoning—thank God! Greenwood agrees, of course. But we're in a bad spot unless you can compute us down fairly soon."

"Can they tell you their own mass and that of their equipment?"

"Both are tagged with their Earth weights—and so is their stuff. Here are the figures: Dr. Fowler, one hundred-eighty-three pounds three ounces; Dr. Hird, one hundred-fifty-two pounds 9 ounces; three packages of equipment at fifty-eight pounds six ounces, eighty-nine pounds five ounces, and one hundred fifty-eight pounds seven ounces, respectively. Total, six hundred-forty-one pounds fourteen ounces."

"All that," acknowledged Aristarchus, "is down on a tape. We'll take it into our computations. We propose that you blast off again at exactly nineteen point oh-seven hours—that is, about fifteen minutes from now. Meanwhile, your ship's attitude must be altered to the following co-ordinates . . ."

Captain Jones took down the particulars. As he read them back he set the trimming gyroscopes to the prescribed adjustments and started them running. The blunt, bullet nose of the moon rocket began to swing off-course.

"Here is your situation as we assess it," said Aristarchus. "On your present course you could no longer rendezvous with us. You'd be more than twelve hours late. You now have to accelerate on your new course and *overtake* the moon. This will use up so much fuel that you will not have enough for a landing."

"Can you compute us into Orbit Three, where the fuel dump is?"

"That is our idea. We hope to lay you alongside the moon close enough for you to pilot yourself into the fuel dump orbit and to 'home' on its radio beacon. You should have plenty of fuel for that maneuver. You have permission to broach the dump for fuel for the landing."

"One other thing," said Jones. "We're up against it for time. This was to be a forty-three-hour voyage. We started with forty-eight hours' air for two men, with emergency air for a further forty-eight hours. But we have four men aboard—which wipes out our reserves. We have to get fresh air forty-eight hours after our blast-off from SSSC2. Otherwise we must live on space-suit oxygen—and there are only two space suits."

He paused, scowling heavily.

"Could you feed reserve space-suit oxygen to the two without suits?"

"If we must. But the point is that there's just enough oxygen for four of us for four hours. So we *must* be down well before fifty-two hours from our blast-off from 'two'."

"We'll compute the fastest trip you can make. You will all have to put up with extra gs., and you'll use more fuel starting and stopping."

"Can you give us a graduated

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firing schedule, for the sake of the injured?"

"Of course. Now we have you on radar and can see you by telescope. We are taking check observations with SSSC2 every ninety minutes as she comes around Earth. While you trim ship we'll finish computing and feed you firing data a few minutes before blast-off."

While MR7 swung slowly into her new attitude, Greenwood and Dr. Hird brought the now bandaged Dr. Fowler up through the cargo hold airlock and lashed him into Greenwood's acceleration couch. When Dr. Fowler lay tightly swaddled like an Indian papoose, Jones inspected him.

"We'll have to swing that couch parallel with the long axis of the ship," he said. "It won't do to have that broken arm or leg lying across the line of acceleration. The extra gravities will depress the breaks and hash up the settings. But if Dr. Fowler travels 'head first' the worst increasing weight should do will be to draw the bones apart a little."

He swung himself across to his controls as the gyros stopped and prepared to check the ship's attitude. "I'm sorry, Dr. Fowler, but acceleartion and deceleration will both be pretty painful for you."

Little time remained after they had swung Dr. Fowler into position. Greenwood and Hird held themselves as comfortably as they could against the floor, heads cushioned on folded garments, and flat on their backs. Jones belted himself into his acceleration couch before the controls.

Aristarchus came in. "Time is now nineteen point-oh-four hours exactly. Check?"

"Check," replied Jones, "at nineteen point-oh-four hours."

"Prepare to blast at nineteen point-oh-seven hours as proposed. One half gravity for three seconds —one gravity for three seconds— two gravities for . . ."

Jones entered the instructions on the firing schedule before him.

". . . cut from six gravities to three gravities at forty-one seconds. Cut off at forty-three seconds."

Jones repeated the firing schedule.

"That should bring you across the moon's orbit close behind the moon forty-four hours after your blast-off from SSSC2. You will then have six hours for piloting into Orbit Three, refueling, and landing. We consider you can do that in about three to four hours."

"Should be enough time," agreed Jones.

"You now have seventy-five seconds before blast-off. Any questions?"

"No questions. We'll contact you when we're in free fall again."

Emergency computation can hardly achieve absolute precision. By the time it was certain that they would overtake the moon and have reversed ship to decelerate with the main driving jets, it became evident that they must cross the moon's orbit ahead of instead of behind the moon.

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Once again they all suffered the muscle-torturing extra gravities as they were slowed down across the path of the moon. By the time they had completed their transit their velocity and direction had been substantially matched with the moon's and they had entered an irregular orbit about it.

Fifteen minutes of skilful piloting by Jones, monitored by Greenwood, brought them high over the shallow, saucer-like crater of Aristarchus itself—and then they were sweeping towards the sharp line dividing the light and dark sides of the moon. Around the dark side, below the airless horizon, radio and radar contact with Aristarchus were impossible. Fifty-four minutes later they came up beyond the opposite horizon, and radio-radar contact resumed.

"The problem now is," said Aristarchus, "that, having come in ahead of the moon instead of behind, you are now orbiting in the opposite direction to the fuel dump and can't go near it. Your differential velocity with regard to the dump must be something over two miles a second."

"I know it," growled Jones. "Twice already it has whipped past beneath us—screaming for a second or two as it passes. We might as well be light years away for all the use we can make of it. Can you send up a shot of fuel for us?"

"Hardly enough for you to land on. But our biggest shot will give you more than enough to peel off your present orbit and spiral into Orbit Three. You can then broach the main dump and come in for a landing."

"How soon? Our trouble is going to be air."

"We'll tell you before you go below again. We have your one hundred-eight-minute orbit fairly well already. In your next circuit or two we'll fine it down. By then we'll ready to lay the biggest shot we can fire about twenty miles ahead of you."

A few minutes before MR7 went down under the dark side Aristarchus gave the time.

"In three hours we shall fire the shot. In your second circuit from now you may expect its beacon ahead of you."

Every man on Rocket Base in Aristarchus was alerted and on duty. Commander James Forman, pacing beneath the control dome, looked at his watch for the hundredth time.

"High time they were changing orbits! It's forty-eight minutes since they told us they had grappled the fuel. Keep trying to contact them."

"No response yet," said the radio officer, unnecessarily. "Even so if they have peeled off to swing about they may not come above our horizon until they're in Orbit Three."

"I hope you may be right. Otherwise they'll be up in ten minutes."

In ten minutes, precisely, MR7 appeared in the radar screen. After a minute the radar officer announced, in a dull voice·

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"MR7 is still in the same one hundred-eight-minute orbit. Fuel tank trailing behind. No change in velocity or direction."

"Ask 'em what's wrong!" cried Forman to radio. "Why haven't they peeled off?"

No answer came from MR7. For more than thirty minutes the radio appealed, cajoled, and nagged at MR7 while they watched with anguished hearts and helpless hands as she traversed the screen, silent as a dead ship, to near the far horizon. The last few minutes before going out of range had come when the radio rustled and came to life.

"Moon Rocket Seven — Jones commanding—calling Aristarchus."

"Come in, MR7," replied Aristarchus eagerly. "Talk fast!"

"Sorry for delay—" Jones' voice sounded strained, his breathing labored and panting, as if from great exertion, or perhaps shortage of oxygen. "Been working against time. Please prepare for landing of this ship next circuit—in about one hour to seventy-five minutes. Ambulance needed to take off injured passengers without space suits through pressure seal. Explain action after landing. Have you received message?"

"Message received!" broke in Forman. "Will prepare for landing as you request. But can you make it? What is wrong?"

"Time—" panted Jones. "Only time—so we *have* to make it. Meanwhile, we still have a lot to do."

The radio fell silent as MR7 went below the horizon again.

"He can't do it! He'll crash," snapped Commander Forman. "He's five good Earth tons too heavy to land on that shot of fuel." Leaning across his desk he flipped the keys on his intercom. "Prepare for landing of Moon Rocket Seven in one hour! Get crash gongs out and both ambulances! Prepare for possible cases of explosive decompression. Four people aboard—two without space suits!" He flipped the keys off. "We'll be picking up more than two injured passengers or I'm no judge. Try to get him by radio when he comes up again."

Brilliant sunshine shone on the white areanan of Aristarchus beyond the narrow shadow of its rim where the pressure-sealed buildings of Rocket Base nestled. Yet the lunar sky was velvet black and studded with unwinking stardots as Commander Forman paced beneath the plexiglass control dome and harried his radio officer to establish contact with MR7. It was nearly eighty minutes since Jones had requested landing facilities. He was high above, now, as radar showed. If he were coming in, it should be very soon . . . Forman stopped in midstride.

Amongst the stolid bright dots there was one twinkling, stellated spark. . . .

"Here he comes!"

The one twinkling star grew larger—lengthened rapidly into a quivering pencil of yellow-white

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light. Ears strained futilely to catch what would have been, on Earth, an increasing, thunderous roar, despite each onlooker's knowledge that the airless void which prevailed right down to the surface of the moon could transmit no sound.

As always, the incoming rocket held everyone in suspense. Never, until the last few hundred feet, did it appear that the incoming ship would land inside the area. And this time there was an extra concern —whether the fuel would last. Would the narrow margin between just enough fuel and none at all be consumed while she was still a hundred—or even fifty—feet up?

MR7 had slowed almost to a stop when the tip of her forty-five jet flame touched the ground. It flattened, became an inverted mushroom of fire, then a flaming, writhing flower. Into this the stubby, bullet-like rocket settled slowly. Then the dazzling petals wilted and died.

"She's crashing!"

She fell the last twelve feet—to totter, right herself, and then bounce drunkenly up and down between her three grasshopper-like legs standing on flat discs."

As an ambulance and several pressurized electric jeeps started forward, the rocket's airlock hatch swung out and a space-suited figure crouched in the opening. He jumped, and, in what looked like "slow motion" to eyes used to Earth gravity, floated gently across thirty feet of heated ground around his ship. Alighting smoothly, he waved the ambulance straight in, leapt aboard the nearest jeep, and signaled urgently through the pressure-cabin window. The jeep rushed him fast towards the control dome.

Inside, the spaceman removed his helmet. He cut off Commander Forman's rush of questions by speaking first.

"Astrogator Greenwood — MR7 —reporting, Commander. Can you please arrange for a rush unloading of cargo and refueling as soon as the ambulance has our passengers out? I must take off again inside two hours and go back for Captain Jones."

"Go back! Where?"

"Into our recent orbit. He's up there—'riding herd,' as it were, on about six tons of our cargo and dispensable items. We jettisoned all we could during our last two circuits. That's why we had so little time to communicate with you. We even threw out the ship's radio after our last contact. To lighten ship was our only chance to get down with our passengers before the air went too bad."

"But six tons—in that time!"

"We worked in space suits, with the cargo hold open to space. Hot work—but you can shift a lot of stuff when it's weightless."

"How long can Captain Jones last up there?"

"Long enough. He has his own and my reserve space-suit oxygen, together with about an hour's supply left in his original bottles. A

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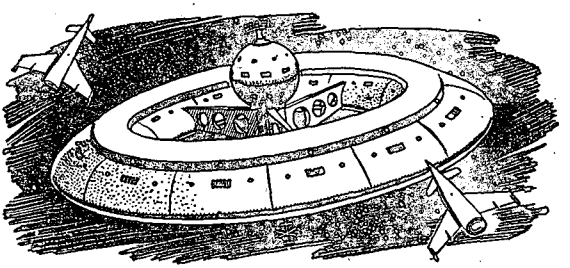
good eight hours he had, I'd say. But I aim to salvage him before he's done four hours. That's enough time in a space suit for any man."

"Too much—with that time unloading, too," agreed Forman. He barked into the intercom, his instructions for the speedy unloading and refueling of MR7. Then he turned again to Greenwood. "Why didn't Jones bring in his own ship?"

"He and I still have a bone to pick about that," replied Greenwood. "I claim it was my job to stay up there with the jetsam. After all, it was my idea. But he said that as he was thirty pounds heavier than I that would save up to eight-hundred pounds of fuel—"

"Perhaps he was right about that—the way you burned out a few feet up."

"Seems like it," agreed Greenwood. "At any rate, he made it an order. Claimed it was his prerogative to decide who would be jettisoned from *his* ship!"



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the flaw

by . . . Bern Sharfman

Grewt had spent the best years of his life studying Earth and pluming himself on his wisdom. How could a tiny flaw defeat him?

GREWT ENTERED the working compartment of the ship that had been both office and home to him for more years than he cared to remember. He glanced at the instrument panel that controlled the observation saucers and saw that they could not be expected to return to the mother ship for several hours yet. A wry grin played at the corners of his mouth as he realized that even his thinking in recent days was parroting the speech patterns of the inhabitants of this still enigmatical third planet in the Sol System.

Idly, Grewt fed a few remaining data tapes taken from the last saucer observations into the mammoth computation machine. A soft hum told him that the machine was adding the data on the tapes to the immense stockpile of facts already known about the psychology of the curious beings below.

"Soon now," Grewt said out loud, forcing himself to use his own native tongue, "there will be enough psychological data to enable me to contact them."

Actually, Grewt felt he had long

Bern Sharfman is a cartoon gagman, and former co-owner of a leading humor syndicate, LAUGHS UNLIMITED. *He is a writer new to our pages and to science fiction, and we are happy to introduce him to you in the glowing aura of a quite remarkable first-story achievement. Mr. Sharfman writes: "I feel that science fiction has matured man's attitude to an intelligence from outer space, and bred a feeling of expectancy—a healthy sign surely."*

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had enough data to satisfy him personally. Ten years of saucer observations had been supervised by eight mother ships, and had completely analyzed all physical aspects of the third planet. Since then, he had been left alone with his own mother ship and ten auxiliary observation saucers to plot the psychology of the race itself.

The saucers had first probed the minds of a sampling of the creatures by using a special telepathic machine. Then they had gone on to a complete probing of the culture of the planet. Literature, music, painting, sculpture, all branches of learning and expression of the creatures, particularly those phases dealing with their reactions to space and what might lie in store for them if they attempted to leave their planet, had been probed and condensed by the saucers. So successfully, in fact, that the current probing maneuver might well be the last needed.

Grewt moved to the computation machine and said, as if it could understand him, "We've both earned a rest period, I believe. We may as well take it now." Grewt turned the machine off, and moved away to his own rest chamber.

When he awoke, the saucers had already returned to their berths in the underpart of the mother ship. Eagerly, Grewt gathered the tapes they had brought back and returned to the working compartment. Turning the computation machine on again, he methodically began feeding the new tapes to it. Soon, he would have his final computations.

As the machine hummingly devoured the tapes, Grewt turned to the most important task at hand. Far in the past of his home planet, when space exploration had begun, all applicants and trainees for the Space Service had been impregnated with one thought, one basic precept.

"When the time actually comes for contact with an alien intelligence," the instructors had told them, "no precautions that you may take can be too many. Complete protection both for our sake and for theirs is of the utmost importance."

As a result, many rules and regulations as to procedure in event of discovering an alien intelligence had been written down in the Space Service manuals. His was the job of putting the finishing touches to the vast research and observation program that had been expended on this planet, and then to contact the intelligent beings and offer them the brotherhood of his own race.

The humming computation machine digested the last few tapes and stopped. Grewt fed in a summation tape, and the machine began to coordinate the vast amount of material about the psychological factors of the planet. Grewt moved to a large locker at one side of the machine and opened it to reveal a large, rather bulky space suit. He had just removed it and spread it out along a work table, when the

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computation machine finished its work and a white sheet of paper with the final digested analysis of the data fell into place in the output bin of the machine.

A quick scanning of the analysis, and Grewt moved hastily as if in a final hurry to carry out his mission. He placed the basic space suit into the adapter mechanism, and set the controls in accordance with the suggestions in the analysis.

Seating himself before the thought amplifier, Grewt contacted his immediate superior. Grewt's race, although utilizing oral speech as well, was basically telepathic. When reaching out into space, they had found that greatly amplified thought patterns could pass through infinite reaches of space and still be intelligible when received. The entire mental balance of his race was a keen one, highly dependent on telepathic impressions.

A mark, surely, of greatness!

"All is in readiness, Koti," he telepathed and a receiving set on his home planet with corresponding thought wave length picked up his message almost instantly. "The analysis is done, the space suit is being processed. I am prepared to make active contact."

"It is good," the answering thought came swiftly. "Proceed according to manual instructions, and report when your mission has been accomplished."

Grewt hurried to the adapter mechanism and saw that the cumbersome suit was ready. He stared at it and a shudder coursed through his frame.

"Well, it's for my own protection," he rationalized his revulsion.

Putting the suit on, he clambered awkwardly to the launching platform of the number one saucer. With all of the telepathy and other analysis machines removed, the saucer still could barely accommodate his suited figure. The inside of the cabin glowed as energy coursed through the saucer. A moment later, Grewt was Earthward bound.

He guided the saucer skillfully into the Earth's atmosphere, keeping to the night side of the planet so that all could see his trail and notice his approach. Lower and lower over the American continent the craft swooped, heading under his expert guidance for the northeastern portion of the continent with its more densely populated areas.

A blazing patch of light attracted him, and he turned the saucer toward it.

The area was surrounded by what looked like a vast amphitheatre, open to the sky. The light itself came from a network of metallic beams attached to the top of the structure itself. Literally thousands of the inhabitants were watching several others cavort in the great building. It seemed an ideal spot for a landing, and Grewt maneuvered the descending saucer to the exact center of the area.

The seemingly solid wall of the

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craft parted slightly and a ramp automatically swept down to meet the ground. Grewt, moving a bit clumsily in the heavy space suit, poised momentarily in the opening to survey his surroundings before uttering the momentous greeting of one intelligent race to another.

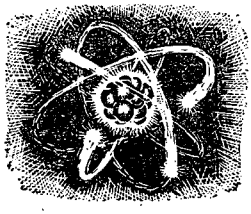
But the staggering impact of the massed fear and loathing of countless thousands of minds staggered his telepathically sensitive brain seconds before the panic-ridden shrieks reached his ears. He stood there for another moment, tentacles waving, trying to adjust the sensitive eyestalks so that they could focus on what was happening. But then the concentrated hatred and revulsion became too much for him, and he dove back into the saucer in hopeless despair.

The saucer rose and sped back towards the mother ship at full drive, the sensitive Grewt squirming in his cramped quarters. Back at the space ship, he crawled out of the saucer and moved hurriedly to the craft's control panel. In short order, the mother ship was moving silently through space back towards its home planet.

Satisfied that the ship was heading properly on its course, Grewt slumped exhaustedly into the seat before the thought amplifier. He paused a moment, still shivering from the mental impact he had been subjected to, and then he made his report.

". . . and apparently, Koti, something went wrong, some flaw in our method of testing the psychological and emotional responses of an alien intelligence. Our forefather's procedure in contacting a race by appearing before them in the form they would naturally expect from outer space must be in error. The reports as analyzed from the minds and culture of this race showed they expected me to appear as I did. Yet, the result was horrible."

When his report had been finished, and only then, did Grewt remember the cumbersome space suit. Shrugging his way out of it, he watched it slump to the floor in sagging folds. His foot bemusedly stirred the artificial tentacles, eyestalks and scaled outer layer that the adapter had provided. Then, stretching his two arms high up over his head, and working out some of the painful kinks that the bulky suit had caused, he headed for a sorely needed rest period.



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pioneer stock

by . . . Judith Merril

Dear Burt:

I deeply regret the necessity for what I must do, darling. You see, I am returning your ring by registered post. I need hardly tell you that this reluctant action represents no change of sentiment on my part. But after your last visit, and in view of the decision you have come to since, I have no other possible choice . . .

Leah was an outcast, scorned and despised by her own people. But what man of Earth could resist the gentle sweetness of her love?

TWO YEARS AGO, when both of them were just past being children, he had given her the ring. Deena had worn it proudly ever since, and it shone brighter in the world's sight than her own gleaming beauty. It shone brighter because she saw to it that no man could notice her without noticing as well the ring that committed her to one man alone.

Every night since then she had gone to sleep holding hands with herself: the fingers of one hand ardently stroking and caressing the slender band of metal which she wore on the other. And each time he was home from school, for a day or a week, or through the two long

A few years ago Judith Merril was hailed as a pioneer anthologist and energetic critical exponent of a new kind of reading thrill that was taking America by storm—science-fantasy. She has since become one of the three or four outstanding anthologists in the field and few would contest her right to claim priority as America's foremost fair sex popularizer of science-fiction. As a writer in the genre Miss Merril has shining capabilities too, as this, her first story for us, will attest.

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glorious vacations, she had struggled between the pounding needs of her own blood, and the restraining memory of the blood of her ancestors.

Each time she had won the fight until—his imperative accumulated urgency, more than her own, had overcome at last the shame and the fear.

. . . alternative. My grandfather, as you know, was a pioneer here on Ganymede. My grandmother . . .

And now the very memory of that urgency, and of the wonder and mystery of those two nights before his departure, and of the burning in her body ever since, had left her no other choice but this. She knew her heritage well enough, and always had.

But now she knew exactly how he felt too. They could have waited, and endured the last year still ahead. But another year after that, or three or five—the time which must of necessity elapse before she could join him on the far frontier they would send him to—no, it was unthinkable.

She sat at the table in her own room, the room in which she had grown up, and would almost surely live all the rest of her life, and stared at the last two words she had written: *My grandmother.*

She couldn't tell him after all. She would have to go back too far, explaining. He would read the words, and never even know what they meant.

. . . My grandmother was not a happy woman, though she loved her husband dearly, and he her in return.

That much was true, no matter which grandmother you were speaking of.

Perhaps it is unfitting in the descendant of "pioneer heroes" to be so fearful, but . . .

Burt didn't know. Nobody knew except the family, and perhaps a few old-timers who didn't talk. When the whole world knows part of the story, the part that's not fit to be known is buried deeper than usual.

. . . but perhaps it is just exactly that background of growing up in a household where the stories of pioneer days and pioneer hardships were so much a part of my conditioning . . .

* * *

Thatcher and Leseur came out on the same ship, but they didn't team up right away. Life on Ganymede was not so tough that you had to have a partner to survive. If you could stand being alone almost all the time, it was smarter to keep your pickings to yourself. There was plenty of room then for everybody, and plenty of uranium scattered about, and the Dzairdee, the graceful, green-skinned peoples who were native to the satellite, were as timid as they were backward, and thus represented no menace to the roaming prospectors.

Phil Thatcher had always been a lonely man, even in the crowded

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cities of Earth. For him the rocky heights and wilderness valleys of Ganymede were a natural and suitable environment. If every now and then he crossed the trail of a fellow fortune hunter, and spent a day or two in human company, he found it pleasant. But equally pleasant seemed the consolations of solitude.

Leseur was of a different breed entirely. He had been married a considerable time before he left Earth, and his eldest child was four, the youngest a babe in arms. By the time the next rocket came—almost eighteen months after the one that had brought both men—he was tired of living alone, and had found a pleasant valley rich enough in ore and soil to support his family, and house them in comfort.

He sent back an urgent message to his wife, asking her to join him, but he knew it would be a long and weary wait. In fact, the shiny-buttoned rocketeers he talked to in the spaceport all said the next rocket probably wouldn't come for another two years.

When the ship had gone off, carrying his lonely message, he had followed the crowd to the freshly-stocked bar at the spaceport, and bumped into his old friend Thatcher. They spent a wet week-end together, and at the end of it, on George's pleading, Phil came back to spend a few days in the valley where Leseur meant to build his home.

Thatcher didn't stay long, that time. But he did give the other man a hand with the foundations of the new building, and even got into the habit of dropping by from time to time, to help out with the great house that was being erected.

As long as there was work to do, Leseur was fairly happy and good company. But stretch the construction job as he might, by adding a room here and a window there, it was completed in six months' time, and when Thatcher stopped by to see him after that, he found George so eager for company that when he left it seemed as if he were breathing easy for the first time in his life. The best part of a year elapsed before he thought of going back again.

What brought him back was partly the rumor that had sprung up about some girls coming out on the next ship, and partly George's reminder that it would be easy for him to build another house nearby. Thatcher was a man who liked to be alone. But he was also a man, and he was beginning to think that it was time he had a woman he could call his own.

A third reason was that the peaceful, gentle Dzairdee had lately been showing a different, uglier side to their natures. They hadn't minded when humans came and took the useless uranium out of the rocks. There was plenty of wilderness and plenty of rockland, and the two races could get along.

But when other men than

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Thatcher began to feel the press of desire for women they'd left a world away, when slender supple daughters of the Dzairdee began to leave their homes and defy their fathers to answer the temptings of the humans . . . then the fathers and husbands-to-be of the peaceable primitive people gathered together, and summoned their savage gods to aid them, and out of their ancient lore manufactured weapons of great simplicity and great finality . . .

It was time for a man to build a house and settle into it, and be prepared to snare one of the women who might come. So Thatcher went back to Leseur's place, and the first thing he thought of when he hove in sight of it was that Leseur would be a good neighbor to have.

There was a high thick stockade built all around the house now, against possible Dzairdee raids. Thatcher's next thought, when he came closer, was a joyful one, for he saw that the stockade was twice as big around as Leseur's own house and yard. Then his joy diminished, for it occurred to him that perhaps some other man had built there. But when he came up to the gate and shouted, and George appeared to let him in, he saw that there was space aplenty for another dwelling.

"I've come to build that house, George," he said.

"High time," said George. But there was something wrong with the way he said it.

"I've been a long time away," said Phil. "Maybe you've changed your mind about wanting me as a neighbor."

"No," said George. "And it's good to see you, man. Come inside. I . . . well, you'll see for yourself, and then you may make up your own mind differently."

Thatcher followed his friend across the wide yard, and into the solid house of stone and wood. He was sure now that George welcomed his coming. But there seemed to be a serious doubt in George's mind as to whether he'd care for his welcome.

When they got to the inside, he understood right away, even before he saw her. The house of a man who lived alone, though ever so clean, could have had no such look of ease and comfort as this one boasted.

Thatcher's head was in a whirl for a while. George brought him a drink that was remarkably like real beer, and sat down with him in the big living room. He cleared his throat and started to talk, and cleared his throat again. And all the while Phil was thinking about the stockade, which must have been built for reasons more urgent and immediate than to protect Leseur's family in the uncertain future.

"I think I had better . . ." George cleared his throat again. He couldn't seem to get it out.

"No need to tell me," Thatcher said slowly. "It's all around me. It was a foolhardy thing to do, Leseur."

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George didn't take offense. He nodded bitterly in agreement, and by way of explaining did no more than go into the next room and return with the girl, Leahtillette.

It was almost enough. By human standards, all the Dzairdee had a sort of faerie beauty. But this girl had more than most. And in a week of staying in the house, Phil Thatcher found it was not just good looks and a sweet way she had. She kept the house and served the meals, and waited on George with a kind of worshipful willingness such as no man could have long resisted.

Then one evening when she had gone to her room and the two men sat talking late, George put the question straight.

"I don't suppose you'll be wanting to stay now that you know?"

"It's hard to say," Phil told him. "Isn't your wife coming?"

"She is," Leseur admitted, and said no more simply because there was nothing to say.

"What will you do, man?"

"Until you came, I drove myself crazy with the question. Then, I thought perhaps . . . Thatcher, she can't go back to her own people. She just can't. She—Oh, I don't *know* what I'll do!" he cried out, seeing an answer in Thatcher's face that made words needless between them.

They went to their beds that night without further talk. During the night Phil Thatcher thought he heard—and he was almost sure he had heard it before—a low crying from somewhere in the house. The next morning he found George out in a shed in the back yard, building a new plow, and put it to him without evasion.

"It's not for her people I'm afraid. And it's not for any fault in the girl, as I see her. Any man would be lucky to get an Earth-girl to be such a wife to him. But she's yours, you see. When your wife comes a stranger, an outsider would only—" He left the sentence uncompleted.

George Leseur could only hang his head, for there was no answer he could make to justify himself even in his own eyes.

"As to building here," Phil went on, "you're my friend, George, and I'm no man to run when there may be a fight. But if her people come to take her back I'd say, let her go. You surely must know you can't keep her. I'd like to build my house beside your own, if you still want me here. But you'll have to make up your mind about the girl, and your own woman. I could live with any kind of hell, I think, except that one."

Later the same day, George came to him, and said simply: "If you still want to build, will you start now, and take my word I'll think of something to do about Leahtillette before my wife gets here."

So it was settled, and the two of them began on the foundation of the second house the next morning. But it was almost another month before Thatcher found out

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the reason why Leahtillette, whom they both called Leah, could not go back to her own people, and what the crying was he had heard in the night.

It happened on one day when she was less quick than usual, and he came across them both in the small side yard where she washed, and hung out her clothes, and where the men seldom went—Leah, and a fat, round, gold-skinned baby.

The first thought that entered his head he rejected as impossible. The next explained just as well why she couldn't go back. When she saw he'd discovered them, she gave a small, frightened cry, and then her features relaxed in a smile of relief. It must have been pure torment, he thought, trying to hide it all the time.

He smiled back and reached out to the baby. Still smiling, she picked it up and gave it to him to hold for a minute. The infant's golden skin was so lovely, it passed through his head first to regret and then to be glad that it would fade to pale green like its mother's in time. If Leah's skin were like that, or if the other women of her race were colored so, a man might find it hard . . .

Thatcher was shocked by the gross sensuality of the thought.

Two discoveries in one day, and the second much harder to face than the first. For now he knew *why* he'd decided to build in a place where there could be nothing but trouble in store for him, no matter how hard George might try to avert it. And he was just as certain as ever that the only man in the world for Leah was George Leseur.

If he'd thought about the trouble that was sure to come before he'd have told himself that it was George he meant to befriend. Now he knew better, in one sense, but he was hopelessly mixed up in another. As near as he could see there was going to be no way at all to help the lovely girl or the golden baby to happiness.

Now if ever, he thought, it was time for him to get out. He went to find Leseur, but the other man was piling stones for the walls of Thatcher's new house, and Phil didn't have the heart to tell him. So he fell to work with an angry pleasure, and nothing at all was said between the two of them.

During the next few days, Thatcher tried desperately to speak to his friend with a candor and forthrightness that would take him out of the stockade forever. But he couldn't be angry at George Leseur for taking the girl and keeping her, to protect her from the anger of her people. Nor could he resent the girl's worship of the other man, nor propose in any way that she and her baby be put out now. He couldn't even feel an active jealousy. His envy was without hope, and therefore without anger. Phil Thatcher had never demanded much from others, and he never expected to.

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So the second house went up, not quite as big, but every bit as strong as the first. As the time for the rocket's arrival drew closer Leah made no further attempt to hide the baby, but brought it out into the yard to watch the men work.

And not a word was said, in all that time, between them as to what could or should be done, for it was clear that whatever happened would not be the simple decision of one man—or even two.

They worked, they waited and they worried—but not together.

And trouble came steadily closer, but not from the direction anticipated. The high thick wall of the stockade had almost made them forget that there were others besides Dolly Leseur who might have a word to say about what was going on inside.

The attack must have been planned carefully for a very long time ahead. The preparations could hardly have gone unnoticed by the two men had they been less harassed and preoccupied with their problems inside the walls. Their only task for days had been the building of Thatcher's house, and the planting of a garden in the houseyard, and going out once a week, to inspect their claims, and discourage jumpers.

When it happened, they had not been outside the stockade for five days running.

It began at night with a dazzling light, and the windy roar of flames. Just as quick, frightening and simple as that, and there was nothing the men inside could do to fight the circle of fire. Nothing, except to stare at each other once in grim despair, and set about preparing for the battle they knew would follow.

Through the night, by the light of their vanishing defenses, they brought in goods and provisions from outside, drawing a store of water from the well to fill every container in the house, boarding up windows, and nailing up the doors. Privately, perhaps, they prayed.

When the morning came, the thick pilings of the wall were burning still. Here and there, gaps had occurred in the wall, but no enemy face showed anywhere.

By evening they might have begun to wonder if the fire had not accidentally started, had it not begun all at once in a great circle around them. But when darkness fell, there could be no further question, for now they could make out shadowy figures at the openings in the wall.

Later, one brave native came through in the light of the still-burning flames, and died on the spot, shot through the heart by Leseur. It happened again, and a dozen times. But the men inside knew they couldn't watch in all directions all at once, and that sooner or later the Dzairdee outside would realize it as well.

They did all they could. They picked the best three spots inside to

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command a full-circle view, and where the outside wall was completely down, they stationed Leah with a gun.

Then Leseur took one of the other two critical places, and Thatcher the second, and they sat watching, and sometimes shooting, none of them knowing when the end would come, nor how long it could be held off.

So it went on through the night, the second night of the fire. By morning, the fire was mostly cold, with great holes in the wall, and the part that still stood loomed charred and black. With daylight to see by, they could still hold off the besiegers. But another night, without the fire to show them where to shoot, would surely be the end.

They both thought of things to do, and would have spoken. But each plan had a flaw that would come to mind before it could be discussed. So they sat at their posts for the most part, or went occasionally to get food, or to refill the bucket of water, or to check quickly on the woman and the baby.

The Dzairdee were not such fools as to expose themselves much during the day, being content to risk a man from time to time, or to set up a ruse to draw fire, just to make sure the men inside would get no rest before nightfall. And the men inside understood this well enough, and tried their best to get what rest they could while still remaining alert and watchful.

The moment of crisis came in the middle of the hot afternoon, and was quick, unexpected and terrible—a cry of anguish from the far side of the house, and a rustling sound, and the thin wail of the baby. Both men rushed from their posts to see what had happened, heedless of their own safety or the safety of the house.

They got there just in time to see Leah being carried, kicking and thrashing, beyond an aperture in the great wall. And while they were still staring in horror at the undamaged door that could only have been opened from *inside,* a stinging feathered thing whirled through to cut a long line across Phil Thatcher's cheek, looking in the red glare like the rake of a woman's fingernail. No more than that. But already spreading in Thatcher's wound was the ancient deadly poison that tipped the Dzairdee darts.

Neither man knew at that moment how irrevocable was their doom. But while Thatcher stood fingering his cheek, trying to bring to mind what he had heard about the darts, and their devilish properties, Leseur moved, suddenly and swiftly, and in quite an opposite direction from what anyone might have supposed.

First he grabbed up a heavy wooden bucket, and dashed the water out of it. Then he took the frantically crying baby, and placed it inside the pail. Then he clasped the open end of the pail to his own chest, and started through the door

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like a madman, out into the unprotected yard, and straight across to where the stockade smouldered, and where they could still hear the pleading screams of the woman.

"Cover me, Phil," he called out, uselessly, and trampled across the new young kitchen garden, running for all he was worth right into the hands of the enemy.

In that moment, without the need of words even to explain the impossible, Phil Thatcher understood much that had not been told him. For an instant bitterness was succeeded by admiration for the expiation his friend was making and then both were forgotten, as the poison entered his blood stream and he fell to the floor with a stricken cry.

There are no heroes among pioneers, she wrote. *There are only desperate men and miserable women. I honor and respect the choice you have made, but my grandfather's blood does not run as strong in me as the blood of my grandmother's people . . .*

Phil Thatcher never regained sufficient consciousness of the world around him to understand that he had become a hero. He never found out how it had been possible for Leah and George together to produce Leah's gold-skinned baby, nor what were the results of Leseur's suicidal spurt to cleanse his conscience and make sure, at least, that one of his children would be safely cared for.

There is no way to know whether Thatcher was lucid enough at any time in the two weeks of torment he endured before he died, to understand that it was Leah who nursed him, and cared for him. It would have been a little easier on him, perhaps, to have known with certainty that the woman was no traitor and that when she opened the door wide it was only to show her kinsmen that her union with the alien from the stars had borne fruit, and was not to be denied. She could hardly have predicted their first battle-nerved reaction to the infant's golden skin—a monster, assuredly, and the wages of the worst kind of sin.

No one, until then, had understood, or bothered to find out, the deeper implications of the morality that motivated the graceful green-skinned peoples.

It was a morality too different in nature from humanity's to be comprehended, in a sense, until just such an act as George Leseur's made clear to the Dzairdee themselves that it was *less* different, than they had supposed.

The single men—and single women—who form the initial brigade of the forces of humanity are a strange and misleading advance guard to the alien people they meet. Among the Dzairdee, the bearing and raising of children is an endeavor that occupies that most serious thought and careful practices of which any people are capable.

No Dzairdee woman has ever

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conceived a new life except in circumstances of secure and settled love. No Dzairdee woman, before Leahtillette met George Leseur, ever found a human male to lavish the right kind of love on her, and with a true yearning for a child of his own.

If Leah did not understand that it was the children his wife had already given him on a far-away world that he longed for—her mistake was a blessing to two races, since it led to the act that established the basis for a lasting peace between green skins and pink skins, and the gold-skinned offspring of their unions.

My grandmother was not a happy woman . . .

Deena looked at the line again, and slipped the ring painfully down the length of her finger, gold against gold, with the small stone flashing under the light. She had called them both Grandmother: Leah and Dolly. She had called George Grandfather, though she knew that her own granddaddy was dead.

And when she heard the truth, at last, it was not from Leah nor from George, but from Dolly—from Dolly who was not supposed to know at all that the woman with whom she had shared her home for thirty-four years had been her husband's other wife.

Leah had used Thatcher's name, and her son, who was Deena's father, had been called Peacemaker Thatcher, and it was Phil to whom the history books assigned that act of mercy and attrition that had established the basis for peace forever between the Dzairdees and humanity. Poor old George could not claim the glory, for it would have meant also claiming his son, and that he *could not do.*

Leseur loved Leah, and he loved the baby, and he saw to it that they were both as well cared for as his first wife and his human son and daughters. But he loved Dolly, too, and . . .

Perhaps he regretted the decision sometimes, later on. But once it had been made, he could not alter it. Phil Thatcher, not George, with a dart scratch already on his cheek, had made that heroic run into the arms of the enemy, to return a baby to its mother's arms. So the world believed, and so Deena left the story now.

Carefully, she wrapped the ring, and packaged it. Then she went back to the letter and read through what she had written. There was no way of explaining it all. How could she say, "I will never trust you enough, after such separation, to bear your child, and if my life must be barren, I had rather bear the grief and the anguish alone."

She took a fresh piece of paper, and copied the first part of her letter carefully.

. . . *I see no other possible alternative. I beg you to believe that there are factors in my early childhood that make this action the only one I can take, and further beg*

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you not to try to see me, nor to make any effort to change my mind.

I honor and respect what you are doing. I am not prepared to do it with you, but you will agree, I think, that any life together would not be worth having if I were to keep you from it.

She read it through again, and signed it, "Sincerely, Deena Thatcher," and sealed it, and went out to post the letter and the package both.

Then she came back to her room in the big house George Leseur had built for his families, and cried.

STATEMENT REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AS AMENDED BY THE ACTS OF MARCH 3, 1933, AND JULY 2, 1946 (Title 39, United States Code, Section 233) SHOWING THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION OF FANTASTIC UNIVERSE, published monthly at New York, N. Y., for October 1, 1954.

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H. L. HERBERT, President.

(Seal)

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 27th day of August, 1954.

WALTER S. COOPER, Notary Public,

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septimus spink, circa 2021

by . . . Joe Archibald

There was eternal glory in the space flight for a man with only one life to lose. How could Spink know he had more lives than a cat?

Metropolita Neuropsychiatorium
Neo Yorkus

Case History 9871186433Q
Name——Spink, Septimus
Date of Admission—Oct. 14, 2021
Age—23

Patient was pilot of military spacecraft. Graduate of Space Academy 74. Some evidence of psychiatric disturbance in his early genes as indicated by his recent request of the Unigovernment for permission to fly the ancient flying machine, The Spirit of St. Louis, now on exhibition in the Terra-Firmament Institute. Spink was one of Earth's aces in the war against the planet, Nougat, in 2019, and destroyed 14 enemy saucers, despite the fact that he was often in his cups.

Three months ago, Spink was one of three Earthians who volunteered for Operation The-Works. After five years of intensive study, Earth and Martian scientists had perfected the "Shafer Pencil," a new space ship fueled by two pounds of radium and which, according to Sep-

Joe Archibald has many ebullient strings to his writing bow, having majored as a big-league, target-confident twirler of the quill. Humorist par excellence, spinner of tales Stevesonianly glamorous for lads in their teens, detective-story raconteur—how can we do him justice in so brief a space, beyond stressing with joy that he now brightens our pages for the first time—with an excruciatingly funny science-fantasy yarn.

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timus Spink, after a miraculous escape from out of the next world, "made a bum out of the speed of light," which is 186,000 miles per second.

Very little rational information has been forthcoming from the patient as yet, and he still insists, despite the combined efforts of the leading neuro-psychiatrists of Earth, that the big button he keeps in the pocket of his pajama coat came off the coat of Napoleon Bonaparte, an ancient dictator, and that a wound in his arm was caused by a leaden pellet shot from an ancient flying machine by an ancient Hun, Baron von Richtofen. Spink, after one session of intense interrogation, asked the leading cranium probers how fast they thought time could fly. "You bigheads have been always concerned with how fast light and sound was. Brother, tempus really does fugit. Bergson once said, 'wherever anythin' lived, there is open somewhere a register in which time is bein' inscribed.' You are very smart guys with degrees from the Interplanetary Ivy League colleges, so tell me where all the yesterdays went. Or is there just one big today. When you fly faster than time, somethin' has t' give."

DIAGNOSIS: *At present as crdzy as a Martian hare. Dangerous.*
PROGNOSIS: *One chance in a million of avoiding space Bedlam.*

I HAVE HAD a gander at that report. I am Septimus Spink, and let me tell you there is a lot that these modern dome technicians have got to learn. They didn't go up in that crate, XXX!, which I did with Fixius Snark and Quartus Goog, so what right have they to insist I am as screwy as a Jovian bedbug?

It is just my luck that I was the only one to survive, so I got no witnesses. When I told the bums here that Goog and Snark lost their heads along with Louie during the French revolution, and Subcommander Cquob was thrown to the lions by Nero just before Rome burned, they put me in an orlonite strait-jacket.

So they think I am permanently off my plutonite rocker, huh? They said the same thing once about a great, great grandfather plus of mine in the twentieth century. His name was Muley Spink. I *was* him for awhile. Time flies, don't it? And it always flies backward!

I am doing some hamming on my viso-screen, and have just picked up a gorgeous green-haired doll from Venus with only one big blue eye when in walks the Earth citizens. They shake their heads at the model of an ancient skybuggy called a Spad I have got encased in a plexiduro globe so that it can't ever fall apart. There is an insignia on its nose, an eagle thumbing its beak. There was a real sense of humor in my forebears, and I have some manuscripts in an hermetically sealed cylinder to prove it. I never did believe them, until I got back from

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Operation The-Works. Let me tell you.

"Spink," the Number One Coordinator of Space Strategic Command says, "We are lookin' for volunteers."

"For what?" I ask warily.

"To be one of the first Earthians to fly a quadrillion miles upstairs further than anybody else," this brass hat says. You would think he was only borrowing my nuclear fission lighter.

"That is quite a pitch," I says. "Is there a return ticket, Commander?"

"Why, Spink, there is nothing sure in this world."

"We are talkin' about the next one," I says respectfully.

"Well," Commander Bjaal says, "Goog and Snark were right when they said you were the color of a Nougatine's paunch."

"Which is very yellow," I sniff. "You mean to say those two liabilities to molecular progress volunteered, Commander? How much scratch did Goog take from the Metropolitan bank vaults?"

The commander looks pained.

"They are patriots, Spink, willing to gamble their lives that their fellow Earthians may know the secrets of outer space. Subcommander Hoona Cquob will pilot the XXX!"

"What incurable disease has he got?" I asks.

The subcommander laughs appreciatively. "Of course there is an inducement, Spink. Fifty thousands dollars in cash, a medal, promotion to Patrol Captain, and maybe a pension for life."

"It is very generous," I retort. "Like promisin' two years subscription to the Galactic Monthly to a citizen who is to be executed in the radium chamber in two weeks. You know what, I'll volunteer!"

Of course the Spinks as far back as the ice age had meteorites in their noggins. And fortune tellers are just as near to knowing what tomorrow will bring as they were in 1600, else I would have consulted one.

"Stout fellow," the subcommander says, and pats me on the back.

It is four A.M. when I arrive at Firing Station 7 where the platalumium pencil XXX! is resting on its derriere. It is about eleven hundred feet high, and is shored up by metal rods anchored deep in the real estate. A dozen space mechs and a lot of top brass are there, also the Interplanetary Press. I spot Goog and Snark and trot over to them.

"Shall we take some bourbon capsules, guinea pigs?" I ask. "Do you realize we would be safer jumpin' off the ring around Saturn without our gravity belts?"

"Sep," Quartus Goog says to me, "I have consulted the Zodiac and I was born under Taurus and it says—"

"The bull," I interrupts. "It sure fits."

"It says Taurus and Capricorn are in the same houses around this

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moon and that nothing can harm them," Goog concludes.

"And what is your excuse to commit suicide, Fixius?" I ask Snark.

"They should have never passed that polygamy law, Sep. Now I got two mothers-in-law."

"You have me there," I says. "I only have one reason I'm gettin' in that hot pencil. It's—huh, I can't think of one."

The Interplanetary Press surround us, and a news catcher from Mars with two bugging eyes and ears the size of flounders ask if we have any last statements.

"You don't have t' be so positive," I snap, and I follow Goog and Snark into the equipment bubble. I draw a space suit and helmet, KWX capsules containing steak, fruit, soup, vegetables, lamb and cheese, and I tell the subcommander I'm as ready as I'll ever be. And could I change my mind?

"You're a card," the brass hat says.

"I'll be flatter than one if that pencil breaks up," I sniff.

They take pictures of us that flash simultaneously on viso-screens from Earth to Neptune to Mars and back. A band plays *My Universe 'Tis Of Thee,* and we climb up a hatch and into the pencil which has three compartments.

The lower part is the radium chamber and the middle part is our stateroom. In the nose is the steering apparatus and the planet direction antennae, and more instruments than we have use for. Subcommander Cquob says he knows every one better than the robot pilot and I ask him which one brings us down. I get him there.

"Stand by!" Cquob yelps.

We secure our pressure rompers and adjust our helmets. "Ready for takeoff!" announces Cquob.

"Let me out of here!" Fixius Snark yips, and goes a little beserk. Goog belts him on the helmet with a wrench and I guess Fixius heard the Westminster chimes for five minutes after that.

"Spaceship XXX!, five minutes to-zero!"

"Rogeria!" Cquob acknowledges. "Blue Point Control. All astrogational gear secure and ready for first trajectory fix. Power plant ready—standing by!"

"Oh, Martian brothers!" I chokes out.

"—And one . . . and ZERO!"

The XXX! breaks loose, and through a port me and the other jugheads see all the lights of the spectrum around us. I guess you citizens have heard that two pounds of radium has enough power to swing the earth out of its orbit.

Something was coming up out of me and I swallowed it. It is an awful feeling having your ticker beat right between your tonsils. We were travelling fast, boy! Even in my space suit I could feel my face being dragged down against my neck, and I must have looked funny with an eye on each side of my mouth.

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All at once it was as quiet in the pencil as inside a whale in a stagnant sea, and Cquob yells into the intercom, "We're travelin' over two hundred thousand miles per second, men. The needle's snapped off the speedometer. We've already made forty million miles. See anythin'?"

I look out the port. "Spink to pilot. Just an angel thumbin' a ride. I don't see no sun."

"Light can't catch up with us," Squob says. He puts the pencil on robot and comes into the cabin. "We can only wait until we reach our ceilin', men. We still haven't gone into any kind of trajectory."

"I hope the top of the universe is puncturable," I gulp into my speaker. "I guess we'll never know if the Senatorials beat out the Boston Dacronite Sox." There is no sound, only one that is like the humming of all the honey bees on Earth, and I feel like a tip from a butterfly's wing floating in a jug and I start getting real scared for the first time. All at once there is a jolt that nearly makes an accordion out of my backbone, and for a flick of a humming bird's eye everything is dark. Then everything is normal.

"We cut through a planet maybe," Cquob says. "Went right through like a hot skewer goin' through a paper ball."

"I hope the citizens have a sense of humor," I force out of my throat.

I look out the slit-port. Everything outside is a dirty gray. It is an awful lot of nothing. I count to thirty and then something happens to me. It is like I am sucked out through the port which is only five inches wide and then I'm going through a tunnel wrapped up in a fuzzy cocoon and I land in deep grass as if I'd floated down on a gliding moth.

I sit up and take a swift gander around me, and I have no recollections of spaceships. Two characters are hunkered down close to me and they've got tin helmets on with steer-horns sticking out of same. They all wear fur shifts with big leather belts around their meridians. Most of them have beards.

I says naturally, "See any sign of the Normans yet?"

"No, Bjork. Better go over to the tents and quaff yourself a mug of mead. 'Twill be a battle sure enough."

I pick up my shield and spear and look out over the cliffs and then I see a lot of boats coming with big goose-neck prows. I run toward the tents and yelp, "The Normans are comin'! An' I know we'll win!"

I ask myself then how I knew it, and was glad I didn't take any more of the grog. Of course you know who won the battle of Hastings. It is about over when a big character with a mustache a foot wide whangs me over the tin hat with a sword as long as one of the boats he sailed on, and when I come to I am on the deck of Christopher Columbus's Santa Maria,

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helpin' stop a mutiny designed to throw Chris in the drink.

"I will stand off these knaves," I says to Columbus. "I go along with the idea the world is round, or egg-shaped at least".

"You are a loyal friend, Halvord Spink," the discoverer says. "I am glad they shanghaied you on the Genoa docks."

I was quite a sailor, and two days before we sighted San Salvador I remembered being on Lord Nelson's ship when he knocked the Spanish Armada for a row of binnacles. It was quite a trip back to Isabella.

I am no sooner out of Spain when I get into a war over some roses but find out my name is Clyde then. And all the time there is that sound in my dome like water busting up against a rocky shore.

"Hr-o-o-o-o-osh! Bar----oooooooooom!

It is in France during the revolution I meet Fixius Snark and Goog. They are tossed into the Bastile for smuggling some friends of Louie's out of the country. You have to bear in mind that I did not know them at the time, but remembered vaguely when I woke up in this astra domed booby hatch.

I am standing on the sidewalk watching them go by in a tumbril to get their noggins lopped off, and are right behind the wagon carryin' Marie Antoinette. It is the day after that citizen went to the guillotine, the one who says it was a far far better thing he did then than he ever did, or something to that effect.

"It is awful, isn't it?" I says to a doll next to me.

"Take it easy, Englishman, "she says. "Don't lose your head."

Two minutes later the two citizens who were ringers for Goog and Snark were separated at the neck.

The Spinks sure got into the wars. I nearly froze to death at Valley Forge, and fell out of the boat the Xmas night crossing the Delaware. All the soldiers wanted to leave me drown but George Washington pulled me out himself and we become fast friends. I still got the dollar he threw across the Potomac.

"Rufus, Wardsworth Spink," he says to me. "There will come a day when a dollar won't go anywhere near that far."

A prophet? I'm asking you!

I joined the navy in 1812 and the Limeys snatched me off a ship and took me to England where I got loose and joined the army that had to lick Napoleon. It is at Waterloo I get the button I got in my pocket. It was a bigger brawl than the history books record. The Kraut, Blucher, gets lost lookin' for the battle, so Nap does not get his reinforcements and the Duke plasters him and makes him break out the white bedsheet. The Emperor is that burned he goes into a tantrum, also an epileptic fit, and pulls the buttons off his uniform and strews them around. I get hit

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in the eye with one, the one I got here now.

"Don't feel too bad," I says to Nap as they hustle him away. "We all git our Waterloo sometime. An' they'll name a city after you in Iowa, U.S.A."

And still I have that roaring sound inside my dome like a monsoon goes in one of my ears and out the other. I won't bother to tell you how many times I learned to walk an' talk and how many times I cut teeth and how many times I lost same. I was baptized so many times durin' that space trip it is a wonder I have not got fins and scales.

I guess the Civil war was as bad as any. I enlisted under the name of Eli Stopford Spink and the first place they sent me was Bull Run. Later on I marched to the sea with Sherman, and one night when we are bivouaced, the general asks what I thought of the war.

"It is hell, ain't it?" I says. Of course history gives him all the credit.

And still the roaring is in my ears and I guess it was because the pencil was still knocking off the miles. Not that I was conscious of that then. It looks like propogating the race is like chain smoking, lightin' one bunch of genes with the other. You've lived in times gone by, and if you get in a machine fast enough you can overtake time that has passed. The superbrains, however, scoff at my theory, and give me shock treatments from harnessed sun energy.

I passed briefly over San Juan Hill with some rough riders, and just remember asking a big character with piano keys for teeth under a drooping soup strainer why we wanted the sugar cane in Cuba.

"Well, bully for you," he snaps and asks would I do him a favor and go AWOL. Which I did, and the army klinks in those days, believe me, are just as confining as those of Circa 2021.

I was christened Cyril in 1899, and brought suit against my parents when I was twelve years old, but my case was thrown out of court, and I was glad when a war broke out, and it did not seem any time at all before I was on an airdrome near Commercy, France, with an outfit called the Ninety-Third Pursuit Squadron. Our C.O. is one Major Lucius Bagby, with no more sense of humor than a centipede with athlete's foot.

"Lieutenant Spink," he says to me one day. I want a volunteer! There is an ammo dump not far from Metz which is camouflaged. Go make sure it is there. Of course your chances of comin' back are one in a million, Spink, so shake hands."

I knew I would come back. I couldn't tell why, but I guess you are smart enough to figure it out. I met all of Richtofen's Fokkers on the way, and one of the krauts, and I am sure it was the von nicked me with a slug, the wound from

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which is now on my anatomy. The psychiatristic gentry claim I got it when I was pulled out of the XXX!, and won't change their minds.

I get forced down behind the Heinie lines, and make a run for it, and find myself in Bar-Le-Duc. Half of Hindenberg's dogfaces chase me and I climb on a roof, slide down to the eaves and make myself look like a gargoyle. Close to dawn I manage to steal a kraut staff car after knocking off a Jerry and changing into his burlap, and I am in Commercy at noon handing over the information about the ammo dump to GHQ.

I read all about that caper in the manuscripts I and the Spinks before me had preserved for posterity, and never believed it. But let me digress as you must know about another manuscript that is in that cylinder. I am quite sure I can give it to you verbatim:

"—On the day of the armistice, I, Muley Spink, was shot down behind the Kraut lines by a von who had not got word the guerre was over, or who didn't bother to read the morning Zietungs. I was tossed into a stockade where I lived for six months on puree of turnip skins and black bread, most of the ingredients of which was cinders.

"Comes one day a Kraut wearing thick eyeglasses and a long beard and introduces himself as Ludwig Schinemetz. He sits down in my cell and says he was born two hundred years before his time, and has made a startling discovery while melting up pitchblende in the Black Forest. He says he has a space crate which will go at least as far as Mars. But nobody wants to volunteer to go up with him. I look out the stockade window to see if any characters in white coats are surrounding Stalag 13. Then I look back at the Kraut. 'Whatever he has, I've got to see,' I says to myself."

It is the newspaper clipping I remove from the Spink archives and show the brain diagnosticians, but it convinces them more than ever that I am far off the orbit. Here is what came out of a Berlin scandal sheet in 1918:

Residents of Sauerbratten, a little village on the edge of the Black Forest, were startled out of their beds last night by a frightening whooshing sound. Hans Liebkuken, a wood carver, claims he saw what seemed to be a rocket climbing into the sky.

This fact seems to add an element of truth to the fantastic rumor that Ludwig Schinemetz, once a professor at Heidelberg, had invented a stratosphere airplane. It is, of course, a foregone conclusion that such a radical, premature experiment in aeronautics will end in disaster for the crew.

Yes, Germany has surrendered, but such men as Ludwig Schinemetz and his companions will bring the Fatherland back to a mightier power. Gott Mitt Uns.

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Right after I show the citizens in the white coats this clipping I says, "What makes them think they didn't make it?"

That is when they all looked at each other and shook their domes. But wait, you have heard only the half. Muley got married to a French doll named Vyvette just before the war ended, and there is a record of an Ambrose Spink being born in Nancy, France. This is in the Spink hermetically sealed cylinder, too. It took me awhile to get used to the name of Ambrose. My old man had named me after an old hutmate from Commercy. Like that old Kraut editor had written the krauts had come back stronger than ever and a paranoic named Adolph, a paperhanger, began to paste everybody.

I flew a Thunderbolt against the Focke-Wulfs and Messups and it was quite a doozie all around, and ended up with Adolph getting braised in a bunker. I am standing in his cyclone cellar in Berchtesgarten in 1945, looking at a nude of Eva Braun, and emptying a bottle of Rhine wine.

"Where's Hermann?" I asks the MPs. "Did Fatso git to the border?"

"He's in the pokey," a big shavetail says.

At the time I felt kind of sorry for the big slob as I fought him once he was not such a bad squarehead and didn't sniff happy dust. It was the day Hermann cheated the rope cravat, and I was walking down Wilhemstrasse in Berlin ogling frauleins when it happened. . . .

"Why I'm in the XXX!" I says. "Wonder how long I blacked out? Hey, pilot! Cquob!" I yelp, and then look around.

There are two space suits near me, but they are empty! They haven't collapsed but are reposing against a bulkhead like there are still citizens inside them! A third space suit is leaning against the door leading up to the control chamber, its arms akimbo. It is also a shell! I sweat beads as big as ping-pong balls, and run to the port and look out. Everything is pink and gold outside and I swore I heard music. String music, Buster!

I know the pencil is suspended in space. The instruments in Cquob's cabin are as dead as last century's bean crop. The XXX! is caught in a stagnant aerosargasso sea. Why, I could be there until the end of time! Time! That is what we raced back into and overtook!

Sounds silly, huh? Well, what is time? Is it the fourth or fifth dimension? Consider the fates of my space partners for a minute. Somewhere, way way back they were saved in the nick of time, and maybe they found themselves back there again, and help came just that nick too late the second time. And if Goog an' Snark and Cquob have relatives on Earth, will they be snatched away, too?

Who wouldn't go off his orbit? Man, was I scared. I try to think. Why hadn't we gone centuries

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ahead of time instead of back into it? Because, I tell myself, what is already happened many generations have known about, but He still plans the future and maybe hasn't thought more than half a century ahead which is His business. Citizens these days have more religion than the ancients as they are nearer to Heaven, huh? Don't that sound sensible? I wish somebody would agree with me.

Well, I am nowheres. Empty space helmets back at me. I eat a veal cutlet capsule and follow it up with a coffee pellet. I no longer hear the whooshing sound inside my dome. I hear absolutely nothing. I feel like a fly caught in aspic. It is awful. I do not know how long I sit there like a petrified prune, but soon I hear sounds against the side of the pencil. There is a scraping, grinding sound, and then a tapping. A voice comes through the port which suddenly opens.

"Twuik nojux obwique nostratus," it says. The face behind it puts lepidoptera in my meridian. It is the color of a half ripe lemon, and has two big eyes that are set only half inside a pear-shaped noggin. It wears a skullcap with a funny antenna sticking out from the top.

And then the hatch below me opens and in comes half a dozen of the characters, all talking gibberish. I try Esperanto on them but they don't get it. They reach for me with hands like tendrils from swamp plants, and I try to scream, but can't.

"Exquobu gritzmo lexiquosoma," I think one of the outlandish visitors says.

Then they drag me out of XXX! and I find myself on a catwalk that looks like a steel girder made out of gossamer, but won't bend even under my one hundred and seventy pounds. And fifty feet away is a shimmering disc about fifty yards wide and maybe ten feet thick, and it has little portholes and two thin steel rods sticking out from what has to be its nose. But it is the insignia on the front of the saucer that turns my legs to strings of wet spaghetti. *It is an eagle thumbing its beak!*

So Cyril "Muley" Spink didn't reach a planet? Well, I can't make the noggin testers believe a word of what I told them.

I scootch down when I walk into the hatch of the saucer, and it looks like the lounge on the club of the Harvardians have back in Metropolita, only the furniture looks like it was made from the same stuff as the gangplank I just walked over.

There is still another shock waiting as who comes out of the saucer's control room but one of the space denizens who seems to be the C.O. He looks just like the other whimsies except for one thing. He has the Spink nose, which can not be mistaken back over the centuries. All the others gaping at me have little beaks.

The fantastic characters offer me

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chow and what does it look and taste like? When I was a kid I tasted some plant food once, and then I see one of the little goblins has cut his leg during the process of transferring me to the saucer. He bleeds green!

There is a lot of whirring and clickety-clacking sounds and I know we are moving. The outside rim of the saucer spins around but the inside stays stationary. All the little citizens sit around and stare at me, and then the one with the nearest thing to a nose comes out of his office, sits in a chair directly in front of me and briefs me with his bugging eyes.

All at once he grins, and says, "Fumlix heklu Earthian Spinx."

"If you say so," I says, and look out through a little round port.

Off to the left I see a planet with shadows on it shaped like rock crabs and there is a picture of same in the Metropolita Planetaria, and is known as New Mu. It is one the Earthians and Martians haven't been able to reach as yet. We go over Nougat, buzz the Parsnipian asteroid, and hedgehop Asphasia. The saucer is sure galloping, as these planets are still one hundred and eighty million miles from Mars.

Well, I finally look out and see Earth, and could cry when we skim through the space concessions and airborne cinemas. Some of the Earthian atomic ack-ack artillery take pot shots at the saucer from a hundred mile range, but the radioactive flak just bounces off the sides of the platter like birdseed off a foot-thick sheet of permaduraluminum. I says to myself I hope these little characters won't ever think of going to war.

The green-blooded leader suddenly yelps. "Yulpf!" and all the crew leaps up and scurries to their stations. It looks like a landing, and then I look out again and see we are not more than a thousand feet over the Mississipi River.

It skims over, and then I see the glass domes of Cincinnatus, then the translucite skyscrapers of Neo Yorkus, and the saucer audaciously spins down to the lawn on the estate of a hydroatomic utility king on Long Island. I am quickly jettisoned, and before the hatch closes behind me, those tendril-like fingers pat me on the shoulder and a voice says, "Goomp ize Flugfump-Spinx."

I lay on the grass in my space suit for an hour until I make all tests that prove I have not become defunct. I chew up a pork chop capsule, get up and walk up to the big house with the platinum shingles and mother of pearl roof. I take off my space helmet and knock on the door. A flunkey answers and I ask can I use the family's intercom.

Twenty minutes later I am standing in front of Commander Bjaal, in charge of New Space Projects Number 19Y.

"Well, I'm back," I says. "You won't believe it, but that pencil is still hanging up there so close to

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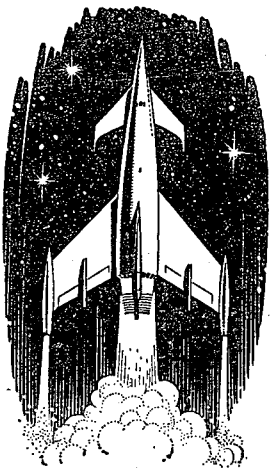
Paradise you could hear the Celestial choir practice. The others won't be back, Sir. Looks like it was too bad for them we traveled faster than time. Time goes back, not ahead, Sir, as common sense will tell you. When you are in a fast speedboat, the wake is in the back, not in front, right? Yesterday you can go back to, but not tomorrow. I wish I could make myself clear."

"You have, Spink," Bjaal says. "You are as nutty as a peanut nursery."

I keep trying to tell them. Many citizens and members of the military saw the saucer but won't believe I was in it. They even have the gall to hint that I got out of the XXX! somehow before it took off The part they insist proves I will always be far off my orbit is my story about a Spink reaching a planet in 1918.

My theory as to the fate of my three pals does not help my case any. Like Time catching up with you if you give it a second chance. And when I say that the XXX! is up in space where two forces of gravity must be pulling it at each end, they consult the Euthanasia Control Board.

But I'll beat this rap. I admit the diagnosis is bad, but I will fix that prognosis. There is one thing they don't seem to get through their big knuckleheads. There will always be a Spink.



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by . . . Robert Frazier

A critic perceptively alert takes a swivel-chair look at the latest trends in science fiction, on a brightly beckoning library shelf.

SHADOWS IN THE SUN by Chad Oliver. Ballantine Books: hardcover $2.00, paper 35¢.

Chad Oliver is a young English teacher and professional anthropologist. He writes somewhat in the engaging early manner of the Clifford D. Simak who could discern in the glowing mists of futures measureless to man an incredible array of fabulous talking animals, and robots friendly to man.

SHADOWS IN THE SUN is a wholly believable and highly imaginative story of a young anthropologist who discovers, while on a research assignment in a small Texas town, that men and women of almost godlike attributes are insidiously invading Earth, forced into exile by population pressures on other planets. For two months he patiently gathers the facts: mobility patterns, racial stereotypes, class structures—using all the usual techniques of a trained investigator working up a community study. They add up to a perfect example of a typical small-town Texas culture—*too* typical.

Robert Frazier enjoys the double distinction of occupying a university chair as an instructor in the difficult-to-teach craft of science fiction writing—he conducts the Science Fiction Writers' Workshop at the City College of New York, *in association with another editor—and of serving as a panel judge on the International Fantasy Award Committee. We know of no one better equipped to appraise with acumen science fantasy in book form.*

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He digs deeper and when all the data is in he becomes convinced there is something wrong. For an anthropologist must, of necessity, be an intelligent man quick to detect a cultural anomaly. What desperate course must he pursue when he learns that he and all of his kind are actually the "natives"—a struggling, backward people—in the amused eyes of the powerful alien citizens of Jefferson Springs? He is tormented by the thought that he could simply by joining the Invaders, share their superior knowledge. But does he want to stop being the man he is. On courageous, very human terms he resolves this exciting challenge, under Chad Oliver's expert guidance.

THREE THOUSAND YEARS by Thomas Calvert McClary. Fantasy Press. Reading, Pa. $3.00.

It is not unprecedented in the history of literature for a man or a woman to rise to fame on the strength of a single novel, or even a single poem. Margaret Mitchell is a case in point. Having once achieved monumental success with her fabulous historical novel "Gone With The Wind," she retired on her laurels and wrote no more.

In the science fiction field, as elsewhere, there have been writers whose reputation rests firmly on a single brilliant achievement in the genre. Thomas Calvert McClary, author of "Three Thousand Years," is such a writer.

Among the most successful and best-remembered of the "thought variant" stories so widely-discussed twenty years ago was "Rebirth," a remarkably perceptive tale of a world where human memory was blotted out and everyone had to relearn even the most fundamental behavior patterns.

"Three Thousand Years" is, in an associational sense, a companion to that work. In this novel, McClary seeks to recapture the spell of "Rebirth" by adopting a similar theme. A scientist puts everyone on Earth into a state of suspended animation for three thousand years. When they awake, only the most fundamental tools remain and civilization has to be built from scratch. The novel has been rewritten since its earlier magazine appearance, and while it is not up to the standard of "Rebirth," it reads easily and entertainingly, and has much to commend it.

STAR SHORT NOVELS edited by Frederik Pohl. Ballantine Books: hardcover $2.00, paper 35¢.

Theodore Sturgeon, who recently won the International Fantasy Award for his unforgettable book, MORE THAN HUMAN, is represented in this collection of three original novels by his equally imaginative "To Here and the Easel"—a tale of an artist imprisoned by the past and a strange girl who desperately tries to rescue him with her shining gifts of a more-than-human love.

Lester del Rey, with arresting vigor and artistry writes of a young

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preacher, doubtful of his faith, who finds in a universal holocaust a blinding vision of man's next religion—in "For I Am A Jealous People."

The third novelist, Jessamyn West, author of the best-selling novels, CRESS DELAHANTY and THE WITCH DIGGERS, makes her debut in fantasy with "Little Men"—a brilliantly discerning story of our world as it might be if there were to be a sudden interchange of size between children and adults.

This collection of three fine short novels is a good buy at any price—how can you go wrong at 35¢.

ASSIGNMENT IN TOMORROW, Edited and with an introduction by Frederik Pohl. Hanover House. $2.95.

This anthology has no motif except the primary one of presenting an impressive array of good stories. The best of the lot, "Mother" by Philip Jose Farmer, is easily worth the entire price of the book. Farmer is one of the few really high-powered talents to arrive on the science fiction scene in recent years and "Mother" should immeasurably enhance his popularity.

Several previously-published stories are repeated in this anthology. They include the poignant "Helen O'Loy" by Lester del Rey, and H. L. Gold's New Yorker-type profile of an intelligent dog, "A Matter of Form." Both are decidedly worth rereading.

Theodore Sturgeon, Ray Bradbury, Alfred Bester, Jack Williamson, Fredric Brown and James H. Schmitz are ably represented with contributions brilliantly imaginative in scope.

WILD TALENT by Wilson Tucker. Rinehart & Co., N. Y. $2.50.

What would be the value of a telepathist as a weapon in a cold war? In this book Tucker skillfully explores this theme but fails to resolve it fully.

The unusual hero, Paul Breen possesses paranormal gifts. His paranormal (besides and beyond the normal) human faculty enables him to foresee events (precognition), be aware of the contents of other people's minds (telepathy) and influence "matter," even causing it to move from place to place (psychokinesis or telekinesis). Employing his finest writing, the author develops this intriguing premise into a fast-reading, deftly-plotted adventure thriller when Paul's ability to read the innermost private thoughts of *everyone* is discovered by our Counter-Intelligence and he abruptly finds himself the focus of the government's top secret project.

This is the first of an upsurge of new fiction dealing with parapsychology and "psi" . . . stimulated by Dr. Rhine's valuable new experiments attempting to prove the existence of "psi" described in his recent non-fiction book, "New World Of The Mind."

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